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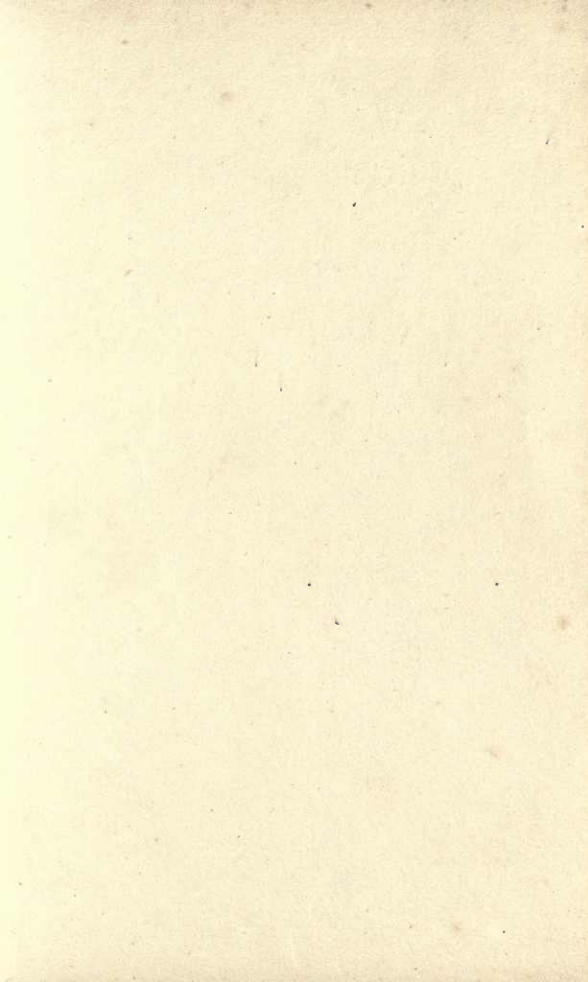
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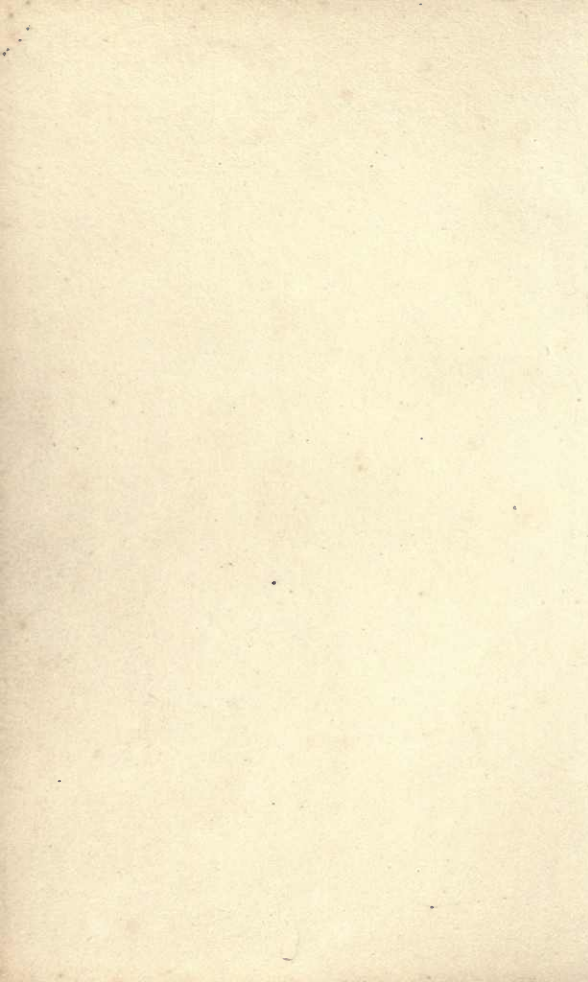
The Olive Percival
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Children's Books





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CHRISTMAS GREENS.



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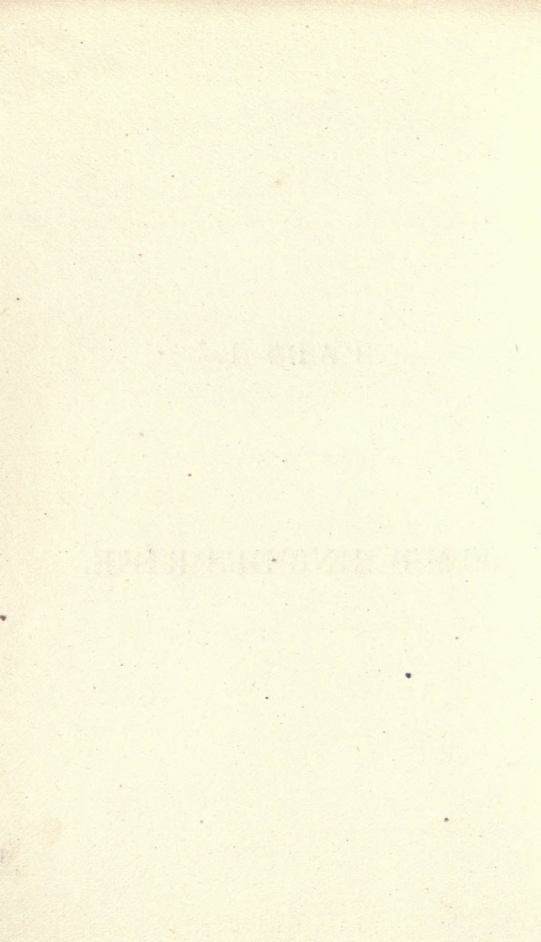
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PART I.

JIM'S ENTERPRISE.



CHRISTMAS GREENS.

CHAPTER I.

A PERPLEXITY.

"MOTHER, can't we do something for Christmas?" said little Jimmy Meade.

"Can't we?" said Alick, his older brother, looking beseechingly into his mother's face.

"I don't see how we can, Alick," said Mrs. Meade, trying to speak cheerfully, though her heart ached within her.

"No Christmas dinner at all?" said Jim, who was only nine years old, and felt sadly disappointed.

"You see, my dear boys," said Mrs. Meade, laying down the pair of coarse pantaloons she

was making, "we have only just money enough to pay our rent."

"But Mr. Parker would wait for the rent, mother; he said he would."

"I know—but he has waited so long already, and the longer he waits the harder it will be for us to pay it. We cannot begin the new year in debt, and we must be honest before giving ourselves a treat."

"But you want a new dress so much, mother," said Alick, "and you said you would get one at Christmas."

"I can make the old one do a little longer," said Mrs. Meade, going on with her sewing. "Do not let us fret, boys; and now, Alick, run out and shovel away the snow from before the door."

"May I go, too?" said Jim, who always wanted to do whatever Alick did.

"Yes, and you may take the broom and sweep."

"I do wish we could have some Christmas,"

said Jim, discontentedly, as they went out of doors.

"Well, if we can't, we can't," said Alick, who was of a much more quiet and composed temper than Jim. "I dare say we shall have a pleasant time at the Sunday-school festival."

"But that won't be like being at home, and I do want mother to have a new dress. They had some real pretty goods at that store down town for twenty-five cents a yard."

"Halloo, boys!" cried Tom Brewster and Joe Norton, their next door neighbours, who were already in the street, busily employed in sweeping the snow from the sidewalk, and in snow-balling one another at intervals.

"Halloo!" answered Alick.

"What will you do Christmas?" said Joe.

"Oh, not much," said Alick, who felt reluctant to admit their poverty.

"We ain't going to do anything," said Jim, who always spoke out whatever was in his

mind at the moment. "Mother hasn't any money, so we can't."

"Dear me!" said Joe; "what a pity! It's so forlorn not to have any Christmas. I'll ask mother to ask you to come and play with us. Father's getting great wages at the furnace, now; there's so much work, and we are going to have a big turkey."

"Hush, Joe," said Tom, who was more considerate and thoughtful.

Alick colored, and his lip would have trembled only that he pressed it so firmly. His father had been a workman in the great furnace, too, and had received good wages and kept his family in comfort and plenty; but he had gone to the war at the President's first call. He had sent home his pay, and, with what work Mrs. Meade could do, they had managed to live in tolerable comfort; but Alexander Meade had been among the names of those killed at the battle of Baton Rouge, eighteen months before, and since then his

widow had found it hard work to provide for herself and her two little boys. Alick, indeed, now and then earned a trifle by various odd jobs out of school hours, but it is not much that a boy of thirteen can do toward the support of a family. She had her pension in prospect, to be sure, but the claim was not yet acknowledged. Her eyes would not allow her to do the finer kinds of sewing, and there were times when she was almost driven to the last resort, an appeal to charity, and Mrs. Meade would rather have lived on bread and water than make that appeal.

The boys worked on, sweeping the snow from the walk, and chatting a good deal to one another, and Joe found time to make a parcel of snow-balls, which he left lying by the curbstone, ready to launch at any of his acquaintances who might come that way.

While they were at work there came round the corner a queer little two-wheeled cart, drawn by a queer little donkey, and driven

by an Englishman, who was so well known in the place as "Old Dick" that no one ever thought of his having any other name. The cart was heaped up with spruce, pine, and cedar boughs, and Old Dick every now and then as he went along, uplifted his voice and shouted "hivergreens" with all his might, for he always put on the H where it did not belong, and left it off where it did.

"Only hear him," said Joe; "ain't it funny? His grandson goes to our school, and he talks just like Old Dick."

Just then a woman came out of a house near by, and called to Dick, who stopped his cart. Jim, broom in hand, ran off to see what Mrs. Spinner would buy, and stood looking on, while she concluded her bargain for some spruce and cedar boughs to make the house look gay for Christmas. Old Dick asked a very tolerable price for his bushes, and did not realize as much as he would have done had he been content to ask less. Jim stood

by, holding his broom behind him, and looking as if he were deeply interested while Dick made the change; and Joe, I am sorry to say, picked up one of his snow-balls, ready to let fly at the donkey, who, quite aware of his intentions, stood watching him out of one eye, prepared to dodge when the ball should come. Alick, who had been finishing up the sweeping, stopped a moment to blow his cold fingers.

"Alick," said Tom Brewster, putting his hand in his pocket and speaking in a low voice, "don't you want to get Jim a Christmas present?"

"To be sure I do," said Alick, rather shortly, "but if I can't, I can't."

"But see here, Alick, I've got some money, and I'd like to give him something, he's such a clever little fellow, and your father was a soldier and all," said Tom, expressing his kind feelings with great awkwardness; "and you can take this and get something, and it will be all the same thing," and Tom put a new

twenty-five cent note into Alick's hand and ran away up the street without waiting for an answer.

Alick looked at the note, and his first impulse was to refuse it altogether, but then he glanced at Jim, who was still occupied with the cart of evergreens, and thought how pleasant it would be to surprise him with a gift on Christmas morning, and finally, resolving that he would ask his mother, he put the money in his pocket. Meantime Mrs. Spinner had concluded her bargain, and gone into the house, when Jim suddenly asked Old Dick where he got his evergreens.

"Hout in the cedar swamp, ten miles from 'ere. Do you want any, lad?"

"Yes," said Jim, "but I've no money to buy them."

"That's bad. I've none to give away, either."

"I never asked you for any," said Jim, indignantly.

"Well, you needn't be huppish, youngster. There, will you have some?" and he held out a fine bunch to Jim's eager hands.

"Oh thank you! Thank you, sir!" said Jim, forgetting his vocation immediately. "That's nice."

Dick laughed and nodded, and went on his way down the street, while Jim, in high glee, ran into the house to show his evergreens to his mother.

In the afternoon the boys went to take back Mrs. Meade's work. The shop was quite at the other end of the town, and they were obliged to wait some time, and then, to their dismay, were told that there was no more work for their mother, and would be none for two weeks to come. It was nearly dark when they set out for home."

"What will mother do?" said Alick, in great trouble. "I don't see how we shall make out to live. Oh, if I could only get something to do."

"Well, may be something will turn up," said Jim, who was always hopeful, partly from his disposition and partly because he knew less than Alick of the difficulties with which they had to contend.

On their way back they passed a large church, the school-room of which was open. A pile of evergreens lay before the door, and Jim, always curious, could not help peeping in to see what was doing. There were ladies and gentlemen busily at work; the cornices were hung with wreaths, and several mottoes and texts in pretty green letters already decorated the walls. The trimming was not yet complete, but Jim's active imagination realized what it would be when entirely finished, and he was delighted. They remained only a few minutes, but they did not reach home till tea-time, and soon after tea they went to bed.

In the middle of the night Alick was awakened by Jim's pulling at him.

"Alick! Alick! Wake up! I want to speak to you."

"What's the matter?" said Alick, sleepily.

"Oh do wake up," said Jim, impatiently.

"Is the house afire?" said Alick, alarmed.

"No; but I say, Alick, we can have some Christmas after all."

"How do you mean?" said Alick, a little more awake.

"Look here," said Jim, who had been suddenly struck with an idea, while lying awake. "We can go out to the cedar swamp and get some evergreens, and then mother and you can go to work and make some wreaths, and we can sell them to folks and get some money and buy something. Won't it be nice?" and Jim began to jump up and down on the bed, with as much joy as if his visions were already reduced to reality.

"But look here, Jim," said Alick, "how are you going to get to the cedar swamp? It's seven miles by the railroad and ten by the

other way, and who would lend us a horse and wagon, and we can do nothing without one?"

"Couldn't we get some one going that way to take us?" said Jim, rather dolefully, as he became sensible of the difficulties in the way.

"But who would bring us back and our evergreens? and we ought to have a good many, or it would be of no use; and then we should have to spend a day about it, and make the wreaths and all, and it's only three days to Christmas. You'll have to give it up, Jim."

"I don't know; I believe we might, if you only would," said Jim, who had set his heart on the plan. "We would contrive some way."

"What way?"

Jim was not prepared to say what way, but he still thought that the matter might be accomplished if his brother would only help.

"If you would just give your mind to it, Alick."

“Well, I have given my mind to it,” said Alick, rather impatiently, “and I know it can’t be done. Now do let me go to sleep.”

Jim said no more, but he lay awake for some time, trying to invent some method of overcoming the difficulties in the way of getting to and from the cedar swamp, but he could think of no plan, and went to sleep still unsatisfied.



CHAPTER II.

PERSEVERANCE REWARDED.

THE first thing in the morning, Jim went to his mother with his plan; but Mrs. Meade thought of the matter very much as Alick had done.

"But, mother, suppose we could get out there and get some, would you let us go?"

"If you could, Jim, but you can't; so come to breakfast."

The breakfast was soon over, for it was but a scanty meal, and when Jim had gone out Alick told his mother of Tom Brewster's gift, and asked what he should do with it.

"You are sure the money was his own?"

"Oh yes, he earned it at the furnace, shoveling coals."

"It was kind in Tom, and I think he would

be mortified if you returned it. I had rather he had given it to him himself, but if he likes to make a Christmas present I don't know why he shouldn't."

"What shall we get?"

"A pair of mittens would be the best for him, if you could get them. You can look round and see."

Jim in the mean time had run down to the railroad track, which was not far off. He knew several of the railroad men, and among others, Mr. Gaylor, the track master, who happened to be out this morning with his hand-car.

"Good morning, Jim," said Mr. Gaylor. "How's your mother?"

"Pretty well," said Jim, looking with longing eyes at the hand-car, on which he had often wished to ride. "Are you going away to-day, Mr. Gaylor?"

"Yes, out on the road a piece."

"How far?" said Jim, suddenly struck with another idea.

"Out about ten miles."

"Through the cedar swamp?" said Jim, eagerly.

"Yes."

"When will you come back?"

"To-night."

"Oh please, Mr. Gaylor," said Jim, in great excitement, "will you let Alick and me go? We want some evergreens so bad to make some wreaths and things and sell them, and so get some money for Christmas; for mother's out of work, and she said we might if we only could, and won't you let us go on the hand-car?"

"Why, I don't know," said Mr. Gaylor. "Do you think it would come to anything if you went?"

"Oh yes, sir," said Jim, confidently.

"And then it's a cold day, and you see the car won't hold a great many."

"But we'd make ourselves ever so small, sir."

"Well," said Mr. Gaylor, "I don't care if you would like to go, but you must be quick, for I shall be off in a few minutes."

Jim ran home as fast as he could, and rushed into the house like a whirlwind.

"Oh, Alick! Oh, mother! Mr. Gaylor says he will take us out to the cedar swamp on the hand-car, and bring us back, and he wants us to go right away. Oh, Alick! do come!"

"But stop a minute," said Mrs. Meade; "are you sure?"

"Oh yes, he said so, only he wants us to come directly. Oh, mother! you said we might, if we could," cried Jim, trembling with impatience.

"Well, if you will be very careful not to get hurt on the car," said Mrs. Meade, who perhaps would not have consented quite so readily, had she thought the expedition at all likely to take place.

"But I don't understand," said Alick, who was by no means enthusiastic.

"Oh, never mind," said Jim, "you will; only do come. Where is the hatchet? Oh, Alick, hurry!" and before he knew what had happened, Alick found himself whistled away down the street by the impetuous little boy, who was in an agony of anxiety lest Mr. Gaylor should have gone without them.

They were just in time, and when Alick found himself actually upon the car and gliding swiftly over the rails, he began to feel his spirits rise, and to think that the undertaking might come to something after all.

Jim was rather apt to conceive magnificent ideas, which were all very well as long as they remained ideas, but which, when he tried to put them into shape, were apt to be failures; whereas Alick, being more content to go on in the beaten path, was usually successful. He always liked to see to the end of his work, but Jim, if he could only make a be-

ginning, was willing to leave its conclusion to whatever chance might direct.

"Suppose we do get some evergreens," said Alick to Jim; "how shall we get them up from the railroad? You never thought of that."

"Oh, some way," said Jim.

"Some way!" repeated Alick. "That's what you always say, but I can tell you it won't be so pleasant to find yourself landed at the foot of Erie Street, after dark, with a lot of evergreens, and no way to get them home."

"Oh, don't begin to make trouble," said Jim. "I said we'd contrive to go some way, and we have."

"I guess your contrivance wouldn't have come to much, if it hadn't been for Mr. Gaylor; but I tell you what we will do. When we get home, one of us can stay with the things and the other can run up and borrow

Joe's wheelbarrow. I know he'll let us take it."

"Well," said Jim, with some reason, "why couldn't you say so at first, without making difficulties?"

They were nearly three-quarters of an hour in reaching the place, for a hand-car, though a very delightful conveyance for boys, does not travel so fast as a locomotive ; but at last they entered the borders of the swamp, which was of considerable extent, and stretched along the track for two miles.

"Now, boys," said Mr. Gaylor, as he helped them off, "I shall be back here about three o'clock this afternoon, and do you be along here by the edge, and do not venture too far into the swamp, or you may get lost. Now, take care."

"Yes, sir," said Alick.

"Good-by, then," said Mr. Gaylor, and the car pushed on.

The boys looked around them, and for the

first few minutes felt inclined to be quiet. They had never been in such a place before. The track was cut through the middle of the swamp, and the rails laid on a low embankment. On either side the cedar and tamarack trees grew close together, mingled with tall leafless elder bushes and the straggling gray branches and black berries of the nanny bush, entangled with the Virginia creeper, which here and there retained some of its red leaves. The ground beneath, where it was not covered with snow, was carpeted with moss and bear's grass, and as the marshy places and pools were frozen over, there was firm footing ; but the branches interlacing overhead made the place dim and solemn, and not a sound broke the stillness, except the cawing of a distant crow.

CHAPTER III.

A SUCCESSFUL ENTERPRISE.

"COME along, Alick," said Jim. "What are you waiting for?"

"Waiting to see how it seems here. It's curious, isn't it? It's so still.

"Well, it seems to me as if I wanted to get some cedar," said Jim, and going farther in among the trees, with two or three blows of the hatchet he brought down a great bough of cedar.

"All right!" said Alick, and the two going to work had soon a great deal more of the evergreens than it was likely Mr. Gaylor or the hand-car could find room for.

"Now," said Alick, at last, "we had better pick out the best of these, and put them to-

gether as close as we can, because we shall want a good deal."

This work occupied some time, but when it was done, Alick, going out on the track, found by a look at the sun that it would still be a long while before Mr. Gaylor would come for them.

"What shall we do?" said Jim. "It's cold here, and I'm tired of going about. Why can't we build a fire and get warm? I've got some matches in my pocket."

"Very well," said Alick: "it wouldn't do any hurt, I suppose;" and the two boys set to work, and gathering dry branches from the swamp, and the sweet-scented crackling cedar boughs, soon had a fine fire blazing below the embankment. Then Alick cut some more branches and made a sort of wigwam to keep off the wind, and they sat down in great content to enjoy the warmth and shelter.

"I wish we had something to eat," said Alick. "We came off in such a hurry."

"Oh!" said Jim, "let's make believe we are soldiers, out on picket, as father used to be, and I'll go into the swamp and make believe shoot a deer, and then we can make believe cook it."

"I don't think you'll be much less hungry after all that," said Alick; "but if you're a soldier you'd better look out that the guerrillas don't catch you, when you go into the swamp. They hang round in just such places."

"Oh, Alick!" said Jim, looking about, half-scared, "suppose there should be some of them round here!"

"Nonsense; they won't let them come over the border. You never heard of one in this State."

"Well, there might be, you know;" and Jim, who had been in great haste to be off after his imaginary deer, sat down again.

"You'd make a great soldier," said Alick, laughing. "Afraid to go into the bushes a

rod off, after a make-believe deer, for fear of a make-believe guerrilla."

"Well, when you make believe a good deal, it seems as if it was really so," said Jim. "I'm not afraid one bit;" and Jim started up, went valiantly in among the trees a little way, said "bang" as loud as he could, and came back, pretending to drag his game with great exertion. The boys made believe cut up and roast their invisible venison, but it is doubtful whether they were any less hungry after this feast than before. However, it served to divert them, and Jim said he really felt as if he had had a good dinner, but then Jim had an active fancy. When the venison had been all eaten up, the hand-car came along, and the boys gathered up their bundles of greens and prepared to start.

"Why," said Mr. Gaylor, "how do you suppose we are going to put all those on the car? But I guess we will manage," he added, good naturedly. And so he did, and the boys

and their evergreens were soon safely stowed away on the car with Mr. Gaylor, and the two men who accompanied him, though it is true they had to sit very close, and that there was not much room to work the machine.

They reached home in safety, a little after dark, and Mr. Gaylor made interest with a man who drove one of the railroad wagons, to set them down with their bundles at their own door.

"Oh!" said Jim, as they went in at the gate, "I wish we had something real good for supper."

Their mother met them at the door.

"I was just beginning to be anxious about you," she said.

"Oh, mother, we are nearly starved," said Alick.

"And we did get some greens," said Jim. "Lots of them," and he rushed into an account of the whole expedition, while his mother moved to and fro, preparing the meal, which

was more scanty than she could have wished, being nothing but bread and tea. It was all she had, however, and neither of the boys complained, though they would have liked something more substantial after their long day out of doors without any dinner. After tea, Jim was very anxious that they should make some "wreaths and things," and Mrs. Meade consented, although not very hopeful about the plan in which her little boy had so much confidence. Alick cut the sprigs with his knife, and his mother fastened them closely with twine around a piece of steel from an old hoop-skirt. Then she bent the two ends together, and the result was a very pretty wreath. Jim was in delight at the first one, but he grew so sleepy before another was finished that his mother sent him to bed, where he soon forgot his plans and his expectations.

"Mother," said Alick, as they worked on, "do you really think this will come to anything?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Meade, who began to be quite interested in her new work, which was an agreeable change from stitching pantaloons. "It seems as if it might."

"So many things seem so, and don't turn out to be anything, after all."

"Don't be discouraged, Alick."

"I am, mother," said Alick, dropping his work; "I can't help it. When I see you working so hard and getting so little, and you ought not to take a stitch on account of your eyes, and yet I don't see what will become of us now that there's no work; and I can't get a place anywhere; I've been disappointed so many times. There was the situation at Mr. Gordon's—I went the minute I heard of it, and it was just filled, and the place in Mr. Peck's hardware store, and he promised me, mother; and when I went, on the very day he set, he had forgotten all about it, and taken some one else; and everything is so dear, and we can hardly get bread to eat,

and you haven't clothes to wear. There's the Claytons—Mr. Clayton sends home ever so much money from Canada, and the boys have all they want. I'd do anything I could—I don't care how hard—but I can't find a chance."

"I don't want to make comparisons, Alick, but we can't help seeing what is right under our eyes. Would you rather that your father should have slipped away out of the United States, because he was afraid he should be called on to do his part, as Mr. Clayton did, and be sending us money now from Canada, but afraid to come home, than that he should have left us, and risked, or even lost, his life for God and his country?"

"Oh, mother! of course I would rather he had gone with the regiment."

"You see we have our gift and the Claytons have theirs; I would not change."

"Nor I, mother; but I can't help getting down-hearted, now and then. I don't want

to think about our troubles any more than I can help, but the more I try not to, somehow, the more they come into my mind."

"Then, Alick, the best way is to ask God to give you more comfortable thoughts instead of these, and the next best way is to have something else to employ your mind: Go to work at some little matter that keeps you busy, or say to yourself some verses or a hymn, or, if you have nothing else to do, go to the library and read."

"What a good thing that free library is, mother! How nice it was in old Mr. Vaughan to found it! Whenever I go there, I always feel as if I should like to see him, and thank him."

"Yes, it was a kind thought; and yet I remember, when I was a girl, people used to call him an old miser, because he was then saving his money with this very object in view."

"Was he very rich, mother?"

"Yes ; but he came here a poor boy, with nothing but the clothes he wore."

"He made a good use of his money. I wonder if he ever was as far down in the world as we are."

"He had no children to be anxious for," said Mrs. Meade, sighing. "*We are* down in the world, my dear, and sometimes you are down in heart, and I do not wonder ; but let us trust that these are the dark times, just before day, and even if they are not, we can remember that though we go down into the depths, God is there ; and now we will do no more to-night, but will have prayers and go to bed."

The next day, to Jim's great delight, his mother sat down directly after breakfast to the Christmas work. Alick was a great help, for he was very quiet and had great skill with his fingers, and more than one of Jim's fine ideas would have come sadly short in the execution had it not been for his brother's dex-

trous hands and his knack with paste, paper and knife.

"Why can't you make some crosses, mother?" said Jim; "they put them up in the churches and Sunday-school rooms, and in the houses, too, sometimes."

"It needs a foundation, and I have no pasteboard. I wouldn't mind spending a trifle for some, but they ask a quarter of a dollar for a sheet."

"Is that old box up on the top shelf of any use? Couldn't we take that?"

"I don't know but we might."

"And Alick could cut out some anchors, too; and, mother, wouldn't it look nice to have some green with white places left?"

"You have a great many good ideas, my son," said Mrs. Meade, smiling, "but I am afraid they will hardly all come out of the old box."

"But, mother," said Alick, suddenly, "there's some sheets of quite thick pasteboard up in the loft, that have been there ever so

long. They are fly specked, but they'll do to cover. I'll go and get them."

But when brought down from the garret, the pasteboard proved too thin for the purpose. Jim suggested that two sheets should be pasted together, and he undertook to do it; but he made such work with the brush and the gum arabic that Alick was obliged to perform that part of the business. They found many little difficulties in the way, but Jim's quickness, Mrs. Meade's perseverance, and Alick's skill conquered the greater part of them; and by noon, on the day before Christmas, there was a very pretty assortment ready for sale. There were wreaths and crosses and anchors, and two or three shields in green and white, as Jim had suggested; for Alick had succeeded in covering the fly specked old pasteboard neatly with some white writing paper. Mrs. Meade was quite sanguine; Jim was certain that they should sell all their wares, and even Alick was quite hopeful.

CHAPTER IV.

NEVER DESPAIR.

THE boys put their merchandise carefully into a large basket; dressed themselves in their best, which, alas! was none too good, and set off on their way. The first house at which they stopped was a handsome brown stone mansion, and the lady who lived there was just coming out of the front door as the boys entered the gate. She was handsomely dressed in furs and velvet, but she looked as if all the world "went contrary to her wishes."

"Do you want any Christmas trimmings, ma'am?" said Alick, in rather a faltering voice.

"No," said (or rather snapped) the lady, with such an emphasis that Alick ventured no farther; but Jim, who was not easily discouraged by a sharp word, or by anything

else, made another effort. "Won't you just look at them, ma'am?" he said. "They're real pretty."

"I tell you no," said the lady, so crossly that even Jim started back, and she passed on without another look at the boys.

"There, Jim, I told you it was all of no use," said Alick.

"Oh, what's the good of giving up?" said Jim: "if one won't buy another will. She's not very polite, is she?"

"She's just like all the rest," said Alick.

"Oh no, she's not. Dear me! don't get sick of it, just for one failure. Come! let us go ahead."

They tried the next house, and the next, with a like result.

"Come, let's try again," said Jim, in a tone rather less hopeful, as they went down the steps of a house from which they had just been repulsed by a very spruce and supercilious boy.

"I'm tired of it," said Alick. "I don't want to be treated so any more."

"Well, let me go then," persisted Jim, whose spirits went up as Alick's went down. "Here's an old gentleman coming toward us. Let us ask him."

"It won't be of any use," said Alick.

"Well, but let's try."

"Just as you like," said Alick, almost sullenly.

The old gentleman was large and tall; his coat buttoned up to the chin, with a handsome fur cap on his head, and a gold-headed cane in his hand, which he swung to and fro as he walked. Jim put himself in this gentleman's way, and held up his basket.

"If you please, sir, don't you want some Christmas greens?"

"Don't I want some what?" said the old gentleman, stopping.

"Some trimmings to make the house look gay for Christmas."

"And how do you know I've got any house?"

"Well, sir, perhaps if you haven't, you know some one who has."

"Perhaps I do," said the old gentleman, laughing. "I know numbers of people; and suppose you sell these things, what will you do with the money?"

"We want to get something for mother," said Jim.

"You do? And who's your mother?"

"Mrs. Meade."

"And what was it you wanted to get?"

"We wanted something for Christmas. We always used to have a pudding."

"Indeed!" said the old gentleman, with another laugh. "Well, boys like puddings; I did when I was a boy. Is this your brother?" he added, turning to Alick.

"Yes, sir."

"And what's your name?"

"Alexander Meade," said Alick, so shortly

that almost any one would have thought him cross, whereas he was only low spirited.

“And where’s your father?”

“He is dead,” said Alick.

“A soldier, eh?” said the old gentleman, quickly.

“Yes, sir.”

“Oh! ah! indeed! And where do you live?”

“At No. 7 Allen Street,” said Alick, who began to be tired of this questioning. “Come, Jim.”

“Not so fast,” said the old gentleman. “Come, let us see these pretty things.”

Jim displayed his wares, and the old gentleman asked them if they couldn’t take a little less than the price, and ended by giving them a little more, and nodding good humorously, went off down the street with two wreaths hanging over his arm, and the prettiest cross in his hand.

“There!” said Jim, “we did sell some.”

"We didn't get much," said Alick.

"We got more than we asked. Come, now, don't be cross."

"I'm not cross, but there's no use in spoiling your fun. You go on with the basket; you'll do better than I shall."

"Oh no," said Jim, who saw that Alick felt mortified that he had made the first sale. "You try next time. See all those pretty children up at the window of that house across the street; you try there."

They rang at the side door, which was opened by a nice young lady, who looked as if she had been at work, for her white apron had hemlock sprigs hanging to it, and her hands were stained with green, and her curly brown hair was by no means so smooth as it might have been.

"Do you want to buy some Christmas trimmings, ma'am?" said Alick.

"Come in and get warm, and let us see what you have," said Miss Young, in a pleas-

ant voice, and she led them into a room where stood a great Christmas tree, partly filled with gifts, pretty and useful, and decorated with shining balls of glass and gold, and with little wax tapers, ready to light up in the evening. The room was half hung with wreaths of cedar, but the trimming was not finished, and Alick could not but think that if they meant to have their party that evening, they would have to work very hard. As it was, another lady was tying wreaths, and a young man, in the plain uniform of a sergeant, was nailing the sticks on which they were fastened to the cornice. Jim and Alick stood looking at the tree with such wondering and admiring eyes that they quite forgot their errand, until Mrs. Young asked them to show her their wares.

"Oh, how pretty!" she said, as she turned them over. "Did *you* make these, little boy?"

"Mother, and Jim, and I did," said Alick.

"You will take something, won't you, mother?" said Miss Young.

"If you like, Alice," said the elder lady.

Miss Young took out her purse and asked the price of the ornaments she had chosen, but she looked surprised when Alick told her.

"Perhaps you think it is too much, ma'am," he said, "but it was a great deal of trouble to make them."

"Oh no, I thought it was too little. We sold some ornaments at our festival not so good as these for double the sum you ask. I would rather give you a fair price. I will give fifty cents for the shield and thirty for the cross."

"And what will you take for this anchor?" said the young man, coming down the step-ladder. Alick noticed that he was lame, and wondered how he could manage to get up and down so actively. The anchor was the prettiest thing in the basket, and it had cost Alick much pains to cut it out, and Mrs. Meade to cover it neatly.

"We ask fifty cents, sir," he said.

"All right," said the young man. "Everything else has gone up, and I don't see why Christmas trimmings shouldn't go up, too. I will give you a dollar."

"Oh!" said Jim, unable to contain his delight.

"And what will you do with the money?" said the sergeant to him.

"We want mother to have a dress, and we want something for Christmas."

"Indeed!" he replied, "I hope you will succeed;" and he took out his portemonnaie, while Miss Young left the room. Now Jim noticed that he was lame, and he took it into his head that because he wore a plain uniform, he must be poor, and so Jim concluded that it would be better for the soldier to save the extra fifty cents, and he spoke out in a hurry, as usual.

"If you please, sir, we'd rather not take so *much* from a soldier. They say they want

all their pay for themselves and their families, and everything is so high now."

Mrs. Young began to laugh, but the young man looked as grave as possible, and Alick, who had fancied that the soldier was not in great need of the half dollar, and had felt extremely mortified and quite provoked at Jim, began to think him in the right after all.

"So you think the soldiers ought to keep their pay for their families, do you?" said the young man.

"Every one says so, and do you know they ask fifty-five cents a pound for butter?"

"Indeed! Well, suppose I were to save the price of the anchor in butter. How would that do?"

"But you wouldn't like that, would you?" said Jim, doubtfully. "He may have it for fifty cents, mayn't he, Alick?"

"Certainly," said Alick, in good faith.

"Very well; I want the anchor so much that I think I must have it. This lady is

kind enough to take me in just now, so it don't cost me much for my board."

Just then the door opened, and the old gentleman whom they had seen in the street came in, as if he were quite at home.

"Oh, ho!" he said, "so you've been selling more to my wife. Has she been very extravagant? Have you asked a great price?"

"So far from that, sir," said the sergeant, "that this little man thinks I had better not give him the price I offered, on account of my being a poor soldier."

"You'd better take him at his word," said Mr. Young, quite gravely, and then he spoke a few words in a language which the boys did not understand. The sergeant answered him in the same tongue, and then turned back to Alick and Jim.

"Since you are so kind," he said, "I will take your offer," and he spoke so seriously that Alick was quite convinced that he was in earnest, and thought he had probably been

called in to help in the work, and was willing to agree to Jim's proposition, only that he was rather sorry that his choice should have fallen on that particular ornament. Just then Miss Young came back into the room with two paper parcels and two fine large cakes. She gave one to each of the boys, telling them that there was something to help out Christmas. After they had thanked her, she bade them a kind good afternoon, and they left the house. Mr. Young, however, followed them into the hall, and told them that they had been very thoughtful not to take the dollar from the poor soldier.

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTMAS DINNER.

"I SUPPOSE he can't go back again if he's lame," said Alick, as they went out into the street.

"I suppose not," said Jim. "If his own people are not here I hope that old gentleman will ask him to dinner."

"Who is he?" said Alick, rather impatiently. "I don't see why he need have asked us so many questions."

"Why, he wanted to have them answered, I suppose."

"I don't see why people need be so curious. I can't bear to talk about our affairs to every one, and I wish you wouldn't."

"Well, never mind. Wasn't that young lady very pleasant?"

"Yes, she was," said Alick. "I wonder what's in this parcel. I shall keep the cake for mother."

"Mine's full of candy," said Jim, peeping. "Real nice cream candy, and burnt almonds and sugar plums."

"So is mine. So we shall have some Christmas, after all; but I didn't want her to give us anything. Wouldn't you like to see that tree when it's all lighted up?"

"Won't it be fine! I hope the soldier will get something; but we've got ever so much more to sell, and we'd better be about it."

The next people to whom they offered their wares were very different from the Youngs; they wanted the ornaments, but they exclaimed at the price as too high, and tried to make the boys take less. Jim would have given way, but Alick, who had been warned by Miss Young, refused; finally, after a great deal of grumbling, the lady of the house made a very good bargain for herself. They went

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to one place and to another, with various success. Some people were cross, some were indifferent, and some were kind; but at last when it grew dark, Alick and Jim found themselves with an empty basket, and a much heavier purse than they thought possible when they set out.

"Let's sit down and count up the money," said Jim.

"Best not do it in the street," said Alick, more prudently. "Wait till we get home. Let us go back now; I am tired enough."

They hurried home, anxious to tell their mother of their success.

"Oh!" exclaimed Jim, as soon as he opened the door, "we've sold them all—every one! and a young lady gave us some candy and some cake. Here's mine; do eat it."

"And we've got a heap of money, mother," said Alick, "and the young lady said we didn't ask enough, and told us to raise the price, and we did, and we've sold everything;

only we took fifty cents for the anchor, because there was a poor soldier wanted it so much."

"Very well!" said Mrs. Meade, pleased that her sons had done so well, and that they had found the power and will to be generous. "Let us count up your money."

Alick poured it into her lap, and to her surprise, and theirs, she found that it amounted to nine dollars.

"Now, mother, you'll get a dress, won't you?" said Alick. "They had some stuff for two shillings at the corner. They said they were very cheap."

"Oh, mother, *do* get some," urged Jim. "There was one black one with little white spots that was very pretty."

"I don't know but I will," said Mrs. Meade.

No sooner was tea over than the boys ran down to the corner, bought the dress for their mother, and brought it home, having five dollars and a half left.

"Now we can have a Christmas dinner," said Jim.

"Yes, we will have a little something, but we must not be extravagant, for there are several things that we want more than a Christmas dinner."

The next morning was Christmas, and a very bright and beautiful morning it was. Alick rose early to make the fire, and just as he had put on the kettle, he heard a knock at the door, and opening it, found a coloured man, who was porter to a large grocery, with a big basket in one hand and a sack in the other.

"Here," said he, "dese yer is for your folks."

"There's some mistake, Will," said Alick, looking rather wistfully at the basket, out of which a turkey's legs were plainly visible.

"No, dere ain't no mistake at all. They're all to go to Mrs. Meade, No. 7 Allen Street;

so you just hurry and take 'em out, I 'spect some one's sent you a Christmas box."

Just then Mrs. Meade came into the kitchen, and she too thought it was a mistake, but the man insisted with emphasis, that it was not, and settled the question by taking out the parcels himself and putting them on the table. There was a nice turkey; there were four pounds of butter; some sugar, and some eggs, and some good tea; and the sack contained flour of a good quality, and pinned on the parcel of sugar was a receipt for a ton of coal; the most valuable and most welcome present of all.

Mrs. Meade in vain questioned the man. He protested he knew "nuffin" about it, and, wishing them a merry Christmas, drove away in the best humour. Before breakfast was over, the ton of coal was delivered at the door by a Dutchman who could tell nothing of the mystery, except that his employer had told him to bring the coal the

evening before. Jim was weary of conjectures, but was unable to satisfy himself or any one else, and could hardly eat his breakfast, even with the long unaccustomed luxury of butter upon his bread—so excited was he by the events of that morning. Unfeignedly did Mrs. Meade thank God in her morning prayer for the help that had come to her, and ask His blessing on the kind giver.

In the afternoon the boys went to the Sunday-school festival, and you may be sure that Jim soon found out Joe and Tom and told them of all the good that had befallen them. Alick called Tom aside and asked him to take back his twenty-five cent note, but this Tom absolutely refused to do, and on their way home assisted Alick to choose a pair of mittens for Jim, with which he was greatly delighted. When they reached their own house, their mother had dinner all ready, and never was a Christmas feast more fully enjoyed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE POOR SOLDIER.

THAT evening, when they were sitting together, there came a knock at the door, and on opening it, Jim, to his surprise, found Mr. Young. He asked him to walk in, and introduced him to his mother.

Mr. Young's manner toward Mrs. Meade was very different from his joking way with the boys.

"I met your sons yesterday, ma'am," he said, "and as I was quite interested in their work, I thought I'd call and see how they had succeeded."

"They did very well, thank you, sir," said Mrs. Meade, rather surprised.

"I'm glad to hear it. It was quite a business undertaking for such little fellows, and

in the midst of their plans they found time to consider the poor soldier."

"I don't know, sir," said Mrs. Meade.

"Oh, it's all right," said Mr. Young, carelessly. "Soldiers' families should think of one another. I've two boys in the army, myself; one on the Potomac, and one in Kentucky. Would you like to find a place for your oldest boy, ma'am?"

"If he could find anything to do, sir. He has tried very hard, but has been disappointed in getting work."

"And what would you like to do?" said Mr. Young, turning suddenly to Alick. "Hard work?"

"I wouldn't care how hard the work was, if I only could help mother," said Alick.

"That's right," said the old gentleman. "I want just about such a boy as you are at my store. It's the wholesale dry goods establishment in York Street. You can come to-morrow morning at nine, and I shouldn't

wonder if we found something for you to do. I expect you'll work cheaper for me, because I've two sons in the army, eh?" And Mr. Young got up and said good evening, and went away, talking to the last minute to avoid Alick's thanks.

"Isn't it nice, mother?" said Alick, when he had gone. "And to think it should all have come out of Jim's evergreens."

"Well, they did come to something," said Jim, capering about. "Oh, I wish I was big enough to have a place."

"But you forget," said Mrs. Meade, "that Jim's ideas would never have been worked out but for you."

"But, if it hadn't been for him, I should have given up and come home."

"You are sometimes too easily discouraged, my boy."

"Mother, it is hard to help it."

"I know that we cannot always help feeling discouraged, but the best way is to keep

on working whether we are discouraged or not. And now get me the Bible, and you shall read the chapter about the birth of Christ. We have been brought down very low in the world, Alick, but we have never yet, like Him, been without a place to lay our heads."

Punctually at nine the next morning, Alick went to Mr. Young's store, a large establishment, which employed a great many clerks and porters. He asked for the head of the firm, and was told to go through to the office, —a room in the back part of the building. There he found Mr. Young, and, to his surprise, the lame soldier, now out of uniform, and certainly not looking (in his black clothes) like a man to whom fifty cents could be of much importance. There was a grate, with a glowing fire, in the room, and over the mantle-piece was the green anchor.

"How do you do this morning, Alick?" said the sergeant, kindly; but Alick hardly

knew how to answer him, for he was quite at a loss, and began to fear that he and Jim had made some great blunder.

"So you see," said Mr. Young, "here's the poor soldier again. I let him stay here by the fire, sometimes, and get warm."

"Come, uncle Horace," said the young man, smiling, "it is hardly fair to puzzle the child any more. I'm not so poor as you and your little brother thought, my boy, though I enlisted as a private when the war broke out; but I was wounded and am not fit for service now," he continued, rather sadly; "and am in partnership with Mr. Young."

Alick colored at the thought of their mistake.

"Jim didn't mean any harm, sir," he said.

"Nor did he do any. The spirit that prompted the kindness was just the same as if I had stood in need, and I shall keep the anchor as long as it will hold together, for the sake of the two little boys who were will-

ing to spare something, out of their own small earnings, for one who had suffered for the country, and, as they supposed, stood in need of help."

"Sir," said Alick, struck with a sudden thought, "wasn't it you who sent us all those things?"

The two gentlemen looked at each other and smiled. Alick saw that he had guessed rightly, but he could not find words to express himself; and wishing to help him out of his embarrassment, Mr. Young began to tell him what would be expected of him in his new place, as an errand boy, and what would be his wages, which, by-the-way, were on a much more liberal scale than Alick had expected.

"Mr. Young," he said, with great earnestness, when the old gentleman was silent, "I don't know how to thank you. I hope I shall be able to suit you, and I *will try*."

"That is right, and you may begin directly

by taking this letter to No. 9 on the wharf, and bringing back the answer."

Alick hurried away with the letter, his heart swelling high with gratitude and hope; and eagerly did he run home at twelve o'clock to tell his mother and Jim of his discovery and of his morning's adventures. "And to think," concluded he, "that it should all have come from Jim!"

"Are you not glad you let me speak to him?" said Jim, pushing about his brother.

"Yes, indeed! It is all your doing."

"No it's not," said Jim, less inclined to take the credit than if his brother had been more reluctant to award to him his due share. "You did more than I, for I only *thought* of it, and you *did* it, and it never would have come into my head at all if Old Dick hadn't come into the street with his cart and his evergreens. He brought us our Christmas after all, for he made me think of the matter."

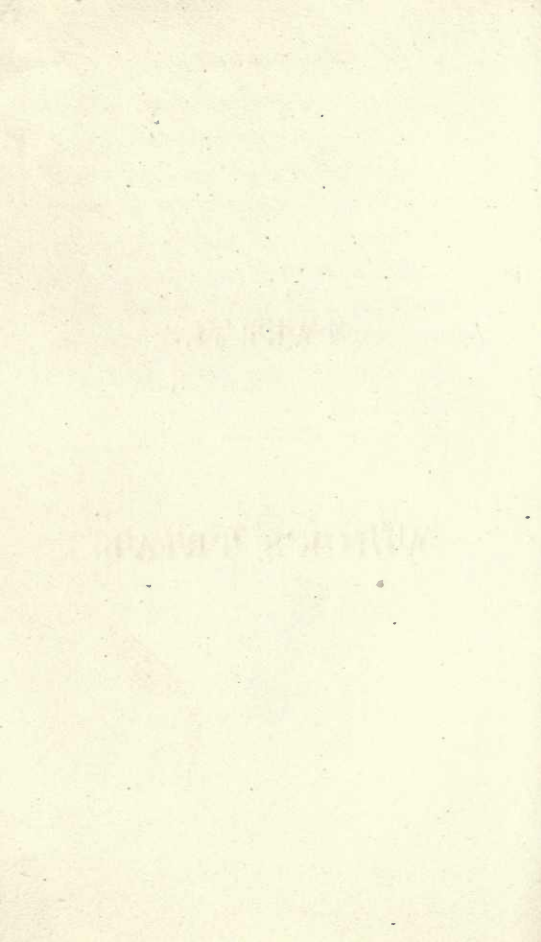
"And do not let us forget to be thankful

to Him who has sent us our Christmas gift through such little hands as yours," said Mrs. Meade, "and above all, to keep in our hearts always the remembrance of that unspeakable gift, which He sent to us on the first Christmas day, and which He is always ready to impart,—the grace of His Son, His presence in our hearts in this life, and His everlasting joy and rest in the world to come."



PART II.

ALICK'S TRIAL.



CHAPTER I.

ROBERT.

LET my readers suppose that a year has gone by since Alick took his place as errand boy in Mr. Young's establishment. The world had gone more prosperously with him, and with his family, than when we last heard of them. Mrs. Meade had left off sewing for the tailors, and obtained much better wages by doing fine washing and clear starching. Miss Young had helped her to find customers, and when she was once known, her exquisite work was its own recommendation. It was really a pretty sight, those heaps of clear muslins and laces, as they came from her hands, they were so fresh and delicate and neat.

With the change of occupation and the

better living which her work enabled her to procure, her health had grown firmer, and her eyes, no longer worn with sewing by artificial light, recovered; Jim was going to school, and was just now occupied, heart and soul, in studying his "piece" for the forthcoming exhibition; for Jim had won some praise as a speaker in his department. Alick went to an evening school, and though he had not so much time to devote to study as his brother, he made good use of what he had. He had succeeded in pleasing Mr. Young, who indeed was not a difficult person to please, and Mr. Walter Young, who had never been able to return to the army, remained his steady friend. He lent him books, and he took a kind interest in his studies, which, under such influence, went on much more to Alick's satisfaction than they had ever done before. Alick had also found a friend in one of the clerks, Robert Eddy, a young man who was much liked and trusted by both the

partners. He was about twenty years old, had a pleasant manner and address, and had several times taken Jim and Alick to concerts and panoramas and other places of innocent amusement.

Alick, who readily attached himself to such as showed kindness to him, could see no fault in his friend. They were on more of an equality than might be supposed, for Robert was rather young and boyish for his age, and Alick somewhat old and steady for one of fifteen. It was rather a trouble of mind to Alick, that his mother did not feel for his friend all the admiration which he himself entertained. Mrs. Meade, indeed, never said a word against Robert, and never offered any opposition to the intimacy, but still Alick thought that she did not quite appreciate him, and he did not understand the reason why his mother could not have told him the cause of any distrust of the good-looking, kind-hearted young man; indeed, she blamed herself for the prejudice:

but for all that it did not wear away, and she always had a certain uneasiness when Alick was from home in his company.

It was drawing toward Christmas again, and the boys looked forward to it with much more agreeable anticipations than the year before. Mr. Young had raised Alick's wages, not (he was careful to explain) as matter of favour, but of justice, for Alick's services were of no small value, and he could always be depended upon. The compliment, however richly deserved, did not make Alick the less grateful toward his employer, for we are sometimes more thankful for justice than for favours. Alick wrote a remarkably good hand, and some of the clerks had employed him to do some writing for them, and had paid him liberally, partly because the work was worth it, and partly because they were in the main a kind-hearted set of young men, and liked to help the boy who tried so hard to help himself, so that Alick had quite a nice

little sum of money put by for his Christmas box. He intended to spend the greater part of it in a warm dark shawl for his mother, and Robert was of course his confidential friend, and took a great interest in the matter.

"Are you going to get your mother's shawl to-night?" Robert said, one evening as they left the store together, the week before Christmas.

"I thought I would," said Alick; "only I don't know how to choose a good one, and I don't just know how to get it home without her seeing it."

"I can help you about buying it," said Robert; "I was a clerk in a retail dry goods store once."

"You were!" said Alick, in surprise; for among the curious distinctions of this world is this, that it is counted much more genteel to sell goods at wholesale than at retail, and the clerks at Mr. Young's held themselves

rather above the young men employed in the retail shops around the corner, and Alick, though he was only the errand boy, nodded to little Frank Price, in the Messrs. Sutherlands' dry goods shop, with a half unconscious feeling of condescension. I am not trying to represent Alick as a model of perfection, or as anything very different from other boys of his age: I am only telling his story; and so when Robert said he had been in a retail store, Alick quite pitied him for having occupied such a position.

"Yes," said Robert, "I had to do what I could then, you know."

"Oh, of course," said Alick; "but it don't seem work for men, does it, to be measuring lace and silk? I think we ought to leave it to the girls."

"So do I; it's just the work for them—but the Sutherlands' have some nice shawls. Let us go and look at them. I'll help you to choose,

and then you can leave it at my room till Christmas eve."

"Oh, thank you! and then she won't know till she gets it," said Alick, much pleased; and they went into the large store, which was brilliantly lighted and filled with people doing their Christmas shopping.

Robert asked to look at black woollen shawls, and the clerks showed them several, but the one which Robert said was the prettiest and the best for the price, cost just two dollars more than Alick had meant to pay. It was a pretty soft shawl, black, plaided with a narrow stripe of white; and Alick thought it was just the thing for his mother, but he could not afford to give more than ten dollars, and this was twelve, and he wanted the two dollars difference for a new cap for Jim. Alick would have given the matter up and turned to the cheaper shawls, which, after all, looked very inferior beside the one on which his choice had first fallen; but Robert showed

that his retail experience had not been quite useless to him, for he succeeded in bringing the price down to ten dollars and a half. Alick thought that for once he could stretch a point, and he could save the fifty cents out of something for himself; so he bought and paid for the shawl, and walked away with it in great delight at his bargain.

"Now you can bring it to my room," said Robert, "and I'll keep it safe for you till Christmas."

Alick went with Robert to his boarding place, and up to his room. Robert had elegant tastes and liked to indulge them, and his room was a very pretty place. On one side of the wall hung a picture of the President in a handsome frame, surmounted by a silken flag, and beneath stood a carved bracket, supporting a handsome china vase, from which grew a German ivy, that, twining around the picture frame, made a very pretty ornament. There were two or three other

pictures in the room, the smallest of which, a landscape, by an eminent painter, had cost Robert more money than he cared to mention. The others were from the hand of his sister, Miss Katharine Eddy, who gave lessons in drawing and painting at the seminary, and had not a little skill in that line. There was a handsome carpet on the floor, and the furniture—Robert's own—was comfortable and well chosen. All the objection that could have been made to it was, that on the whole, it looked rather too expensive for a clerk who had nothing but his salary to depend on. There was an elegant book-case, containing some very handsome books, and a good selection of modern authors and poets. Alick had seen most of these, but there were some French books which seemed full of pretty illustrations, and once, as he was about to look at them, Robert had stopped him, and told him they were not just the things for a boy to see. Alick had been rather surprised,

and he had naturally wondered what they should be, but he had taken it for granted that Robert was right, and had never looked at the books since. Now, however, there was something in the room which Alick had never found there before, and this was a strong odour of tobacco, and not very good tobacco, either. This perfume arose from a cigar, smoked then and there, by a young man who had drawn Robert's handsome green covered arm-chair to the fire, and was making himself very much at home.

Robert's face clouded over as he saw his visitor, and he said quite sharply :

"I do wish you wouldn't make a bar-room of this. I don't like tobacco smoke." And he then opened the window with some force to admit the cold night air. The stranger laughed, and Alick thought the laugh not at all an agreeable one. He might be of any age between twenty and thirty, and though he was expensively dressed, yet Alick felt

that he was not a gentleman. There was a want of refinement and a certain swagger in his manner, which had an air of vulgarity, and formed a strong contrast to Robert's easy and natural courtesy.

"Dear me!" said this person, "I'd no idea you were so particular," and he dropped his cigar into the grate. "I wanted to see you on special business, and I knew where to find your key, so I thought I'd wait."

"I've no time for business to-night," said Robert, hurriedly. "I've an engagement. I'm going out with my sister."

"Very well, I can walk with you, and we can talk of it on the way."

Robert did not look very well pleased at this proposal, but he said no more. Alick bade good night and left the room, but when he reached the head of the stairs he found that Robert had followed him.

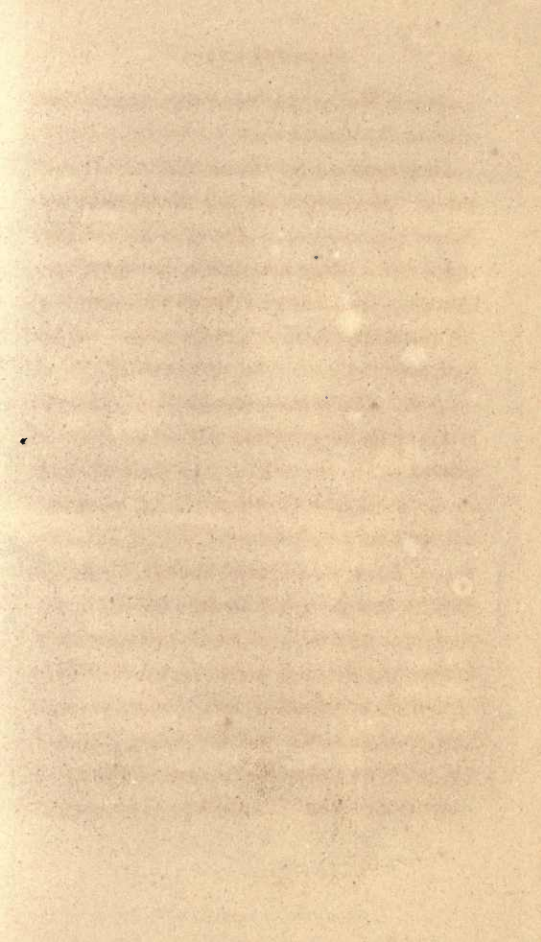
"I say, Alick," said Robert, in a low tone, "if you should happen to be talking to Mr.

Young or Walter, you need not mention that you saw that man here."

Alick opened his eyes in surprise. It was not at all likely that he should mention Robert's visitor to Mr. Young or his nephew, and if Robert had not spoken he would not have given the matter a second thought.

"Of course I shan't," he said. "Why should I?"

"Why should you, indeed," said Robert, with a little laugh, which did not seem quite natural. "Never mind it; good night," and he shook hands with Alick, kindly, as usual, and went back to his room. But for Robert's words, Alick would have thought little of what he had seen, but now he had an undefined, uncomfortable impression of something wrong; and although had Robert not cautioned him, he would never have thought of mentioning the matter to Mr. Young, he now felt as if he should have some difficulty in keeping the secret (if there were one) to him-





self. Long before he reached home, however, he had forgotten the whole affair, and was pleasing himself with the idea of giving the warm shawl to his mother.

Mrs. Meade was ironing, in haste to finish a beautiful India muslin dress belonging to Miss Alice Young, which the young lady wished to wear that evening to a party.

"I'd like to see Miss Alice when she's all dressed up in that pretty frock, and the rest of her things," said Jim, who sat leaning his elbows on his mother's ironing table. "Won't she look nice!"

"She always looks nice," said Alick, rather indignant at the intimation that Miss Young looked nicer at one time than at another; whereas, in Alick's eyes, she was always perfect.

"So she does," said Jim, "but she'll never look any prettier to me than she did the first time I saw her, when she came to the door

in her calico frock and white apron, and bought our evergreens."

"Oh, that reminds me," said Alick; "I wonder if we couldn't make something of the kind for them this year. They always trim up their house at Christmas, you know."

"Yes, to be sure," said Jim, with great animation. "And I know just where I can get the greens. They've got a great many more than they want at the Old Church, and they'll let me have some. I'll go this very minute and get some," and it was no sooner said than done.

"There!" said Mrs. Meade, "he quite forgot that I wanted him to take these things home. They ought to go directly."

"I'll take them, mother," said Alick; "I'd like to do it."

So Mrs. Meade put them up neatly in a basket, and Alick set off on his walk. He hurried, for he did not wish to keep Miss Young waiting, and reached the house in

good time. Diana, the coloured girl, opened the door for him.

"There!" said she, "I was just getting uneasy about that dress. Miss Alice says 'You may 'pend on Mrs. Meade, Diana.' But I don't know,—matters in this world is mighty uncertain,—'specially washing and clear starching, and I'd set my heart on my Miss Alice wearing that dress to-night."

Just then Miss Young came through the hall with her father, and nodded to Alick.

"So you see, Diana, all your fretting was wasted. I knew it would come."

"Yes," said Mr. Young, "Alick can always be trusted."

Alick blushed with pleasure at the praise. Some people are so unfortunate that a little notice makes them presumptuous and assuming, but this was not the case with Alick, and as he never took an undue liberty, he never received any mortifying check, such as those who presume often need. He went

toward home again in very good spirits, thinking of the difference between this year and the last, and his heart was filled with thankfulness for the improvement in his condition. Some people might think that he, an errand boy, the son of a woman who earned her living by doing fine washing, had not much to be thankful for, but such was not Alick's opinion. He thought that everybody was very good to him, and he was contriving how he should help Jim with his decorations that evening, when he was surprised, on drawing near a little low shop for second-hand clothes, to see Robert come out of it, accompanied by the strange man whom Alick had seen in his room. They parted at the door, Robert going swiftly down the street on which stood the seminary where his sister boarded, and his companion walking quietly away in the other direction.

The shop bore no very good reputation, and Alick could not help wondering what

Robert, who was a very fastidious person, could have to do in such a place. However, he did not bestow much thought on the matter, but hastened home, and after tea he and Jim spent the remainder of the evening on the ornaments which they intended for Mrs. Young's parlor; and having plenty of time, better material, and more experience than when we saw them at such work last, they accomplished some very pretty devices, and were well satisfied with their own work.

The next day Robert did not make his appearance at the store till rather late, and did not seem to be in his usual spirits. He looked pale and said he had a headache. Alick was very busy all that morning in one way and another, and on one of his errands through the street, he passed the same man whom he had seen with Robert the night before. He nodded to Alick, familiarly, and Alick, not to be rude, returned the compliment, though he was not very well pleased, for the more

he saw of this person the less he liked his looks.

"Do you know that man?" said the old porter, John Andras, who was with him.

"No," said Alick, "I never saw him but once before. What is his name?"

"Pearson; and the less you see of him the better."

"Why so?"

"Because there's no good in him. He was in our place once, but Mr. Young sent him off as soon as he found him out."

"Found out what?"

"Never mind; nothing to his credit. But you mark my words, and keep away from him. He's no good, I can tell you."

Alick would willingly have learned a little more, but old John could be induced to say nothing except that Pearson was "no good," and Alick thought he understood why Robert should have been unwilling to have Mr.

Young know that he made an associate of such a person.

That evening, when on his way home a little later than usual, Alick called at Robert's room to ask for a book which had been promised him. To his surprise, when he reached the door, Pearson was just taking leave of Robert, who looked (as Alick thought) embarrassed and uncomfortable at seeing him. Mr. Pearson passed him, nodding again as he did so, and turned at the head of the stairs to say to Robert in a peculiar voice, "Now, don't forget."

"No," said Robert, in a tone which did not sound just as usual, and he turned to Alick and asked him rather sharply what he wanted.

"I was only going to ask you for that book," said Alick, hurt and surprised at such a tone from his friend; "but if you are busy, it is no matter."

"I'm not busy," said Robert, in his ordi-

nary manner, "but you startled me so. Come in ; now, Alick, if you don't, I shall think you are angry."

"Of course not," said Alick, forgetting his momentary annoyance, and following his friend. "Who is that?"

"Pearson his name is," said Robert, turning toward the book-case. "Why?"

"If you must know," said Alick, rather bluntly, "I don't like his looks."

"Nor do I," said Robert, with sudden energy ; "I hate the sight of him."

"You do!" said Alick, much surprised, "and how can you go about with him?"

"I don't go about with him," said Robert ; "but he's just one of those people you can't shake off."

"Old John told me that he used to be at our place, but that Mr. Young didn't-like him."

"Old John is an old gossip," said Robert, hastily, "and it is no business of his."

"Why, what harm was it?" said Alick, more and more struck by his friend's unusual mood. "I only asked him."

"And how came you to ask?" said Robert, who was still looking in the book-case for the volume he had promised Alick.

"He passed us on the street and nodded to me, and John told me to have nothing to do with him."

"Well, you'd better take John's advice," said Robert, with some hesitation, and then added more decidedly. "Don't have anything to do with him, Alick,—ever. Don't speak to him, nor let him speak to you. I wouldn't have you know him for anything."

"But if he is such bad company,"—said Alick, in some trouble to express himself.

"You mean, I suppose, he's not good company for me," said Robert, laughing. "But I am older than you, you know; and then he's a kind of cousin of mine, and one can't throw over one's relations entirely, you know."

"No," said Alick, though he thought that had Mr. Pearson been his cousin, he should have endeavoured to forget the connection as soon as possible.

"He's not altogether a bad fellow, either," said Robert; "but he's no company for you, and he's going away before long, too; never mind him. There's your book; and,—oh! by-the-by, they sent me some nuts from the farm, the other day; don't you want some for your mother and Jim?" And he began to fill a good sized basket with fine large walnuts and butternuts. "I wish my mother lived in town. A boarding-house isn't like one's home, after all; and, Alick," he added, as they bade each other good night, "don't you let that man get to talking with you. If he once gets hold of you, he's one of those people that stick like a bur."

CHAPTER II.

A SAD DISCOVERY.

THE day before Christmas Alick bought a new cap for Jim, and instead of leaving it to be called for in the evening, when he came from his work, he preferred taking it down to the store; because, like some other boys I have known, he preferred keeping his new purchase in hand, and because he wanted to show it to Robert. Robert had never been kinder to his friend than during the last few days; but Alick could not help suspecting that he had something on his mind. He had an anxious, uncomfortable look, and once when he thought no one observed him, Alick had seen him leaning his head on his desk in a forlorn, dejected way, quite unlike himself. Alick felt very uneasy, and wished he knew

what was the matter. Robert was generally very unreserved about himself and his affairs, and Alick thought that if he had heard bad news from home, he would have spoken of it.

"You'll call for your shawl to-night," said Robert, as they left the store at tea-time. "Be sure you don't forget it."

There was no danger of Alick's forgetting it, seeing that he had thought of little else for some days. Jim had his secrets too, and it was with great difficulty that he kept them to himself, and especially from revealing them to his mother and Alick before the time. He had taken his Christmas ornaments to Miss Young, who had expressed herself much pleased, and had put them up in the parlours to Jim's great delight. Alick stayed at the store rather later than usual that night. He had been helping old John clear away some boxes and barrels and put things to rights, and it was after nine when he left for home. He called for his parcel, but Robert had gone

out, leaving the shawl with his landlady, and with it a very pretty ivory handled knife, long the object of Alick's admiration; and also a kind little note to say that it was a Christmas gift to himself. When Alick reached home he left the shawl in the entry, so that his mother should not see it till morning. Mrs. Meade was very busy finishing a bright worsted comforter for Jim, and as Alick sat down beside her, and watched her flying fingers, the mother and son fell into a long talk, and Alick forgot his little anxiety about his friend Robert, and he also forgot that he had left Jim's new cap down at the store, until he saw his brother's expectant stocking hanging over the chair.

"There!" said he, in a tone of vexation, "how stupid! I have left Jim's cap at the store."

"What a pity!" said Mrs. Meade; "he will be much disappointed."

"And I wanted him to have it to wear to-

morrow," said Alick. "His old one is too shabby for anything."

"How came you to leave it?"

"Why, I was helping John, and I had so many other things to think of; but I'll tell you what I can do: John sits up till midnight very often. I'll go and ask him to let me in, he lives close by in a little shanty on the wharf."

"Very well," said Mrs. Meade, "perhaps you had better."

Alick seized his cap and ran off. He soon reached the place where old John lived, at the top of a long tumble-down pair of stairs, in a little dark room which was lined on three sides with books, for John was a great reader. He was quite able to live in better quarters had he chosen, but so long as he had his pipe and his books, he cared for little beside, and he had lived in this room so long, that he would not have felt at home elsewhere. He scolded a little when Alick asked him to go down to the store, but he consented for all

that, and the two were soon on the way, John carrying the lantern and the keys. Alick had left the cap quite at the far end of the long store, and John sat down on the step to wait for him, while he went in with the lantern. He made his way among all the boxes and bales which he knew so well, and had just found the cap and was returning, when he was startled by a noise in the story above. It sounded exactly like some one walking, and he wondered who it could be, as he knew that no one but old John or the members of the firm had a key. He paused a moment and listened. The noise had ceased, and he was inclined to think it must be rats. He listened in perfect silence for several seconds. All was still; but just as he was about to turn toward the door, his eye was caught by a beam of light which shone down the ladder-like stair from the story above, and which he was sure did not come from his own lantern. Alick was a boy of very considerable courage,

and he felt more indignation than fear as it flashed into his mind that some one was robbing the place. He thought whether he should call John, but he reflected that it was some distance to the door where the old porter was waiting, and that the thief would have time to escape before he could return; for Alick thought he must have entered by the skylight. He knew that there were several cases of silks and other valuable goods on the floor above, for Robert had been taking an account of them that very morning. He would at any rate try to obtain a glimpse of this robber, and to-morrow he would inform Mr. Young. He set down his lantern, and stole cautiously up the narrow stair. As he did so he heard the sound of a hammer and chisel stealthily at work, and guessed that the marauder, whoever he was, was forcing off the cover of one of the boxes. Alick's heart beat high with excitement. He did not fear for himself, for he knew that he could at

once raise an alarm which would bring John to his help, and he thought that even if he were discovered, the robber's first thought would be flight. Quietly he went on, and as he cautiously ventured to raise his head above the flooring, he saw a man at the end of the long room bending over a box, from which he had just raised the cover. Beside him on the floor lay some pieces of silk, and Alick guessed that he had taken but a little here and there, so that the theft should be less readily detected. The man's back was toward him, but there was something familiar in the stooping figure which sent a sickening pang to Alick's heart. At that moment he heard old John, impatient of the delay, loudly calling to him to be quick. Hastily he drew down his head, but not before the robber had turned and Alick had recognized, with feelings of indescribable grief and shame, the well-known features of Robert Eddy! He hastened down the stairs swiftly yet softly,

dreading for the moment nothing so much as the detection of his friend, and joined old John, who was coming to meet him. He made some excuse for the delay, and walked home, leaving John to lock the door carefully, little suspecting how vain was the precaution.

“Oh! what shall I do? What shall I do?” said Alick to himself, as he went through the street. “How can he do so? How can we ever meet again?”

Never in his life had Alick been in such trouble and perplexity. He felt that Mr. Young ought to know; but how could he betray his friend, who, wicked as he might be, had shown a strong attachment to him? He remembered how, when he had been very sick, Robert had been extremely kind; how he sat up with him night after night, and left a gay party of young people to be with him, and tell him stories to divert his mind from the pain; how he had brought him books, too, and how Miss Katharine, his sister, had

sent him some illustrated papers, to which she subscribed. He invented a thousand excuses for him, such as he had fallen into bad company, and that it was all the doing of that hateful Pearson; but, after all, Alick could not shut his eyes to the fact that the friend to whom he had so looked up was guilty of a great crime and of shameful treachery toward those who had trusted him, and treated him with all kindness and confidence.

Alick knew that Miss Katharine was a friend of Miss Young's, and that Robert visited at his employer's house, which made the theft seem all the more wicked and mean.

He reached his home, and for the first time felt glad that his mother had gone to bed and was not up to meet him. He said his prayers with a feeling that he had never stood so much in need of help and direction, and went sadly to bed. The pleasure of his holiday anticipations was all gone, and there was a load of grief and anxiety on his mind which

would not let him sleep. He could not doubt that the theft must sooner or later be discovered, and he dreaded the consequences for his friend. Mr. Young would be justly offended, and though kind and indulgent, and in general of a very easy temper, he was always provoked when any one attempted to wrong him; and what would he think of fraud and theft committed by one to whom he had shown so much kindness?

Alick knew that Robert would be the last person suspected; and then came another thought which added to his misery,—would not old John be liable to unjust suspicion for another's fault, and he, Alick, would then be obliged to speak out? Was it not his duty to let Mr. Young know the next day? He tossed and turned until he awoke Jim. Alick could not account for his restlessness, which Jim thought so strange, and he tried to compose himself and think what course to take. Finally he resolved that he would see Robert,

tell him all he knew, and beg him to confess the whole, and leave his evil companions, before it should be too late.

When he had formed this resolution his mind was a little more quiet, and he fell into a sleep from which he was first waked by Jim's exclamations of delight over his cap and comforter. Jim's present to Alick was a pretty pearl pen-holder, the price of which he had earned by shoveling snow, carrying coal, and various other small jobs; for Jim was an industrious boy, and had not only bought the pen for Alick, but a pair of warm gloves for his mother. Alick had a new book from his mother and a pair of mittens; but he took little pleasure in his Christmas box, and he seemed so depressed that his mother asked him if he were not well. Alick answered that he had a headache, which was indeed the truth. He did, however, feel a momentary delight when his mother unfolded the nice warm shawl, and praised its colour and texture; but then he remembered how Robert

had chosen it for him, and the thought was enough to embitter the whole, and make him feel glad when the shawl was soon put out of sight. The whole comfort of the day was gone, and when Jim and his mother were preparing to go to Mrs. Gordon's, where they had been asked to meet a party of friends, he begged leave to stay at home, though he had looked forward to the evening with much pleasure. He wanted time to think, but think as he would he could come to no other conclusion than the one he had already formed; and he took his book, but it failed to interest him.

Had Robert been in town he would have gone to him, but he knew that he and Miss Katharine had gone home to spend the day; and he wondered how Robert could bear to meet his mother. "He must tell Mr. Young," said Alick, to himself; and then he thought, "Suppose he will not, what will be my duty?" He could not answer this question, and he thought he might defer its an-

swer until he had seen Robert. He went to bed before his mother returned, and, weary and worn out with his unwonted cares and burdens, he fell asleep.

The next day was very stormy, and it being the day after Christmas, there was a general slackness through the whole of Mr. Young's establishment. Mr. Walter, whose health was not very firm, did not come down at all, and Mr. Young sat in the little glazed office and went to sleep over the paper. There was little to do, and the clerks gathered about the fire, chatting with one another; all but Mr. Howell, the book-keeper, and Robert, who sat at his desk drawing little pictures on a bit of blotting paper. Alick felt that now was his time to speak, though he shrank from the task. He knew, however, that it would not do to delay, and drew near with a beating heart. Robert looked up and smiled as usual, evidently unsuspecting.

"Why, Alick!" said he, "what is the mat-

ter? You are as pale as a ghost. You must have played too hard, yesterday."

"No," said Alick, with a choking sensation in his throat; "no, it's not that. I want to speak to you—by yourself."

"Alick!" called Mr. Howell, from his desk, "run down to Masters and get me a bottle of ink."

"Yes, sir," said Alick, and he had no further chance to speak to Robert that morning, for Mr. Howell took advantage of the stormy day to put in order his own apartment, which was railed in from the rest of the store, and kept Alick busy till nearly noon, dusting the large old books and arranging things generally. He noticed that Mr. Howell, in looking over some accounts, seemed to be in some perplexity, and he began to fear that Robert would be detected before he could make his confession. In his anxiety he made several mistakes, and drew down a sharp rebuke from Mr. Howell, a particular and rather fussy old

gentleman. He submitted to it in silence, and tried his best to give his attention to his work; but it seemed as if everything was against him, for in his very effort to be more careful, he overset an inkstand and sent a black stream pouring all over a pile of clean, fresh engrossing paper, which Mr. Howell had just laid out: and, moreover, he broke the inkstand, which, to be sure, was of no great value, but it was one which Mr. Howell valued highly, as he had used it many years.

"See there, now!" said Mr. Howell, in pardonable irritation. "Just see what you have done! I never saw a boy who did not do more mischief than he was worth."

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Alick, in consternation.

"Much good your sorrow will do. Do go away before anything else happens."

"Pray let me finish, sir," said Alick, in distress. "I think the inkstand can be mended. See, sir, it is only that the rivet is

out of the cover. I know a man who will put it in again in half a minute."

"And who will turn that paper white again? Do you know that paper cost eight dollars a ream, and now look what you have spoiled by your carelessness, just half a ream!"

"Not quite that, Mr. Howell," said Robert, who had drawn near the scene of the disaster, and had slipped out the inner sheets from the inky mass before the ink had time to soak through. "There are not more than half a dozen sheets spoiled at the most."

Mr. Howell gave a little impatient grunt, as if he were rather disappointed than otherwise.

"If you please, sir, you can take it out of my wages," said Alick.

"It will not be a great loss," said Robert; "and Alick is not the first person in this house who has spilled ink."

Mr. Howell pretended not to hear this remark, which he might think had some refer-

ence to a memorable adventure of his own, in which a bottle of ink played a conspicuous part. Mr. Howell did not persist in his intended lecture, but it was some days before he was quite on good terms with Alick again. Warned by this accident, Alick was more attentive for the rest of the morning, and when he went home to dinner, he once more sought an opportunity to speak to Robert, and joined him as he left the store.

"Well, Alick," said Robert, "what is it?"

"I'd rather wait till we get to your room," said Alick.

"Why, what is it, Alick? Have you been getting into any trouble?"

"No," said Alick, "no; but I must see you alone."

They soon reached Robert's boarding-house, and when they were safe within his room, Robert turned to Alick with a concern which was still all for his friend and not for himself.

"What is the matter?" he said.

Alick drew nearer to him and tried to speak, but for a moment the words would not come.

"Why," said Robert, kindly, putting his arm round him, and drawing him toward himself. "Do tell me the story; it can't be anything so very bad."

Alick's overwrought feelings gave way, and he hid his face on Robert's shoulder and sobbed aloud.

"Why, Alick, what is it? What has come over you?"

"Robert," said Alick, in a whisper, "it's not for myself, it's for you."

"For me?" said Robert, starting.

"Yes; I—I was in the store that evening, between ten and eleven. I went up after Jim's cap——"

Robert dropped his hand, and for a moment he turned so pale that Alick thought he was going to faint.

"Oh! I couldn't help it," he said. "I thought at first it was rats, and I went up to see."

Robert turned from him, and hid his face. There was a silence for some minutes, and at last Alick spoke.

"Won't you speak to me?"

"I shouldn't think you'd want me to speak to you," said Robert, in a hoarse, changed voice. "I shouldn't think you'd ever want to see me again."

"Then it is true?" said Alick, in indescribable pain of mind, as the last hope vanished.

"Yes," said Robert.

"Oh! how could you do it?"

"I couldn't help it. Go away, Alick, and leave me to go to ruin my own way."

"That I won't," said Alick, all his affection reviving at the sight of Robert's humiliation. "I never will, and you shan't go to ruin. Do tell me how it all happened. It's that hateful Pearson, I know it is."

"Partly," said Robert, in a half audible voice. "Have you told any one?"

"No."

Robert breathed more freely. "Yes," said he after a little, "I will tell you all about it. It will be a relief to tell some one. You see I am in debt, one way and another, ever so much."

"Why, how can you be?" said Alick. "You don't drink."

"Oh," said Robert, with a sigh, "it's easy enough to get in debt, and I had a bill here and a bill there, and I'm sure I don't know how it's mounted up so. I don't believe I've ever had all the things charged."

"Didn't you keep an account?"

"Well, no ; it's such a bother, and I always thought I should pay when my salary was due, and when that was paid there was always something I wanted ready money for, and I'd no idea how much the bills were till they came in, and Pearson lent me money to pay

some of the worst, and then he got me to playing cards, and he said I could win enough to pay them all back; and sometimes I did win, but one night I lost ever so much, and I couldn't pay, and Pearson was in our store then. He put it into my head to do this, and he said I could put it back. I never thought I could do such a thing, but somehow the idea kept coming into my mind, and finally, one day I wanted money so badly, that I did it, and I made up the difference by a false balance of my accounts."

"But," said Alick, in horror, "that was before I came. That is nearly a year ago!"

"Yes," said Robert, turning aside his head, "I know; it was money first, and then, in some way, while Pearson was there, he got a mould of the keys, and had some made, and he wanted me to use them; and when I wouldn't, he said he'd tell of what I had done already, and I yielded, and I've never known a moment's peace since. I know it will end

in putting me in the State's Prison, if not something worse; and if it were only myself I wouldn't care, but mother and Katharine!"

"How often have you used the keys?"

"I don't know,—ten or a dozen times, perhaps."

Alick was silent,—inexpressibly shocked at what he heard.

"I suppose the whole thing together will be over a thousand dollars; but I've no idea, really," said the unhappy youth; "and now I've told you all, so go and leave me, Alick, I'm not fit company for you, or for any one else. You can't do anything. Don't worry about me or trouble yourself any further, you can't care for me, now."

"I do care for you," said Alick, throwing his arm over his friend's shoulder; "and it's the hardest thing I ever had to bear; but I *do* love you, and I won't see you ruined. Why, Robert, it will certainly be found out, when they take an account of stock."

"Yes," said Robert, in a tone of despairing resignation, "but I can't help it."

"You can help it," said Alick, with energy. "You can go directly to Mr. Young; he won't be hard on you, for Miss Katharine's sake, if you go to him directly; but if he finds it out for himself it will be different. Robert, do go to him this very day."

"Go to him! Tell him how I have robbed him! and when he thought himself so sure of me! Oh, Alick, I can't! I can't! And it would be of no use. He would never forgive me; and I could never face Walter, he has such strict ideas."

"But he must know some time, and it would be better he should know it now. I saw Mr. Howell in a puzzle over the books to-day, and it must come out some time. Oh, Robert, it is the only way to save yourself, and what is more, it is the only right course. You can't go on in this way. What did you do with the silks?"

"There's a man buys them."

"A receiver of stolen goods! And some time the police will be down on him, and it will all come out that way if in no other. Oh, Robert, do go and tell the whole; Mr. Young is kind and liberal, and so is Mr. Walter. You can't let them be imposed on and abused in this way. You can't mean to go on with this, and begin a new year in this way?"

Robert shook his head. "I told Pearson I would never do it again; but I have said so before. I heard old John call that night, but I didn't see you, and he didn't speak your name. I can't bear to have Katharine know it; she would never get over it, and I could never face Mr. Young and Walter."

"Then write to them and leave the letter in the office."

But Robert only repeated that he could not.

"Then," said Alick, trembling with impatience and anxiety, "let me do it for you."

“Oh, Alick, no!”

“But, don’t you see,” said Alick, hesitating, “I would rather go and tell them coming *from* you. Oh, Robert, you know I *ought* not to stand by and see Mr. Young cheated. I can’t feel right. He trusts me, and he and Mr. Walter have done so much for me.”

“Oh, Alick! not now,—not just now,” said poor Robert. “I will tell them—I give you my word I will, but not to-day. Do let me have a little time to think. I know you are right, but I can’t bring my mind to it just yet. I’d rather go into battle and be shot, and I tried to enlist, but they wouldn’t pass me; and how shall I ever pay my debts?”

“What are they for?”

They were for a little of everything. Whenever Robert had seen what pleased his fancy, he had taken it, on credit, if he had no ready money. He owed money to the tailor and to the bootmaker, to his landlady, even to his washerwoman. Handsome furniture, the

carpet on his floor, the frames to his pictures were still unpaid for. He owed for wax candles, for Cologne water and perfumery, for stationery, even for candy and confectionery, —in such a childish heedless manner had he gone on heaping new debts on the old and incurring needless expense. The share he had received of his unlawful gains had gone to pay a part of his board bill, and in an attempt to win back some of his losses at cards, and part for some clothes which he had thought necessary, and which he could no longer obtain on credit. Alick, to whom he showed some of his numerous bills, turned them over in perfect dismay, and in amazement at his folly.

“I know what you think,” said Robert, sadly; “I’m not as much of a man as you are, for all I’m the oldest; but I’ve made my bed and I must lie in it.”

“No, no,” said Alick, “you need not, if you will only tell Mr. Young. Do have a little courage about it. You’ll be sorry all your

life if you don't; but you won't do it again, Robert—promise me you won't."

"Yes," said Robert, "I will. I said it should be the last time. I told Pearson so, and it shall; and I will tell Mr. Young, Alick, indeed I will,—only not to-day."

"But let it be this week, do. Oh, Robert, don't begin the New Year with such a thing on your mind. I don't want to lecture you or scold you. It's not my place, and you've been so good to me, and I *do* love you," said Alick, in distress of mind. "Don't do it because I say so, but because it's the right way. Ask God to help you, and He will."

"He won't hear me," said Robert, sadly. "I've forgotten all about Him this long time."

"You wouldn't have gone wrong, if you had not," said Alick; "and if I can care for you and love you, I am sure He can."

"You are a good boy, Alick, and I wish I had known you before."

"But you'll tell Mr. Young?"

“Yes, I will—only I can’t to-day.” And with this half promise Alick was obliged to rest satisfied.

Never had he passed so miserable a week as that between Christmas and New Year’s. Tuesday and Wednesday went by, and still the confession was unmade, and Robert contrived to avoid Alick in so many ways, that it was impossible to speak farther with him on the subject. Thursday evening, however, he went up to Robert’s room, determined to come to an understanding. Robert was ashamed and humiliated, but still he could not resolve to make his confession. His great trouble was that he could not bear to have his sister know it, and he felt that it could hardly be concealed from her.

“If it was not for Katharine,”—he said in distress.

“But she must know it some time; and wouldn’t it be better she should hear it by your own confession, and know that you have

done what you could to atone for your offence, than that she should hear you had been detected?"

"Atone for it!" said Robert, bitterly; "my whole work for years wouldn't atone for it."

"I can't stay any longer," said Alick, in despair, "and I can't live in this way and see you going to ruin when you might help yourself, if you would. You promised me you would do it this week, and you ought to. Next Monday is New Year's day. Don't begin the year in this fashion. You know what is right as well as I. Do be a man. Has Mr. Young ever been anything but kind to you?"

"No; that's the worst of it: and Walter trusts me so. How can I tell him I've deceived him so?"

"How can you keep on deceiving him?" said Alick, who was beginning to lose patience with Robert's indecision.

"I won't, I won't," said poor weak Robert;

"I will tell him to-morrow, but it will ruin my whole life."

"It will ruin your whole life if you don't. I tell you it is your only chance. Now, Robert, do go."

Robert promised, but Alick could not have the confidence in him which he once had, and there was little hope in his mind that his word would be kept. That night, about midnight, a neighbour's baby was taken suddenly ill with croup, and Alick was called up to go for the doctor. On his way back he passed the same little low shop, of which I have spoken, and to his dismay he saw Robert steal to the door. He carried a large roll under his arm, and Alick, with a feeling which was almost despair, saw that he must have been robbing the store again, in spite of his promise. Robert knocked at the door and was admitted immediately; Alick went on his way utterly sick at heart. He could not stand by and see Mr. Young robbed, and he

felt that if Robert could not be depended on to keep his word, it would be his own duty to tell Mr. Young.

The next morning he could well understand why Robert avoided him ; but Alick was determined to see him, and he gained an opportunity by following him to the back part of the store, when he was called into the office by Mr. Walter, and waiting till he came out.

"Robert," he began, without ceremony, "why didn't you keep your word?"

"I can't stay to talk, now," said Robert, hastily, running up stairs.

"But I must," said Alick, following him. "Tell me, didn't you come here again, last night."

Robert coloured deeply. "How did you know?" he faltered.

"I saw you come to that place, when I went for Dr. Craig, last night."

"I could'nt help it, Alick. He made me."

"Made you!" said Alick, out of patience ;

"how can you be so weak! Look here, let me go and tell Mr. Young, now."

"Oh, no! not now. Do let me be, Alick."

"But I tell you I can't see this go on, and if you won't tell, I will. I do love you, Robert; I think I'd give my right hand to save you, but I can't help you if you won't help yourself, and I must do what is right."

"Oh, Alick! you won't?" said Robert, in alarm.

"I must," said Alick, firmly; "I owe something to him and to Mr. Walter, and I can't have this go on."

"But don't go now, oh don't," said Robert, detaining him. "Walter has just gone home, and Mr. Young is out of temper about something, and it's no time." And by entreaties and coaxing, the poor weak youth prevailed on Alick to promise, against his better judgment, that he would say nothing on the subject that day to the head of the house.

Alick went home in a wretched state of

mind, and could no longer conceal his uneasiness and anxiety from his mother. Mrs. Meade had seen for some days that her son was unlike himself, and that he had some hidden source of trouble, but she thought that he would tell her of his own accord, and did not press him. When it went on so long, however, she began to feel seriously uneasy, and to-night Alick was so worried and depressed that even Jim noticed it.

"What is the matter with you?" he said.

"Not much," answered Alick.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Meade. "Alick doesn't feel very well, and now I want you to take home these laces."

Jim obeyed, and when he had gone, Mrs. Meade turned to Alick in real anxiety.

"What is the matter, my child?" she said. "I am sure there is something troubling you. Can't you tell me what it is?"

"Oh, mother!" said Alick, "I wish I could! I wish I could!"

"Have you been doing wrong?" said Mrs. Meade, quickly.

"No, mother, not particularly; but I don't know what to do. I can't see my way. It isn't *my* secret."

"I'm afraid it's no very pleasant secret that keeps a boy of your age awake nights."

"Oh, mother!" said poor Alick, "I wouldn't have it if I could help it. It was an accident that I knew anything about it; but I am so distressed and bothered, and I want to tell you and I don't know whether I ought."

"You must use your own judgment," said Mrs. Meade, convinced by Alick's tone that his anxiety, whatever it was, was not for himself. "You are old enough to know, and I leave it to you."

If Mrs. Meade had resolved to fathom the mystery, she could not have taken a better way. Alick was touched by his mother's confidence in him, and he stood sorely in need of her advice and help. In a broken voice he

told her the whole story, and ended by beseeching her not to be too hard upon Robert, as he had been led away by bad company. "And now," he continued, "what shall I do? He was at it again last night, and I dare say he might be again, and Mr. Young ought to know, and he can't make up his mind to confess. What ought I to do?"

Mrs. Meade went on with her work in silence for some minutes. Then she said, "Mr. Young trusts you."

"I know it, mother, and I don't feel as if I ought to stand by and see him robbed; but how can I go and tell of Robert? Why, it's a very great crime. It will send him to the State's Prison, and I can't help loving him, after all."

"He has been good to you, Alick, and you do right to care for him. He is a very amiable, kind-hearted young man."

Alick felt grateful to hear these words

from his mother, for he knew she had never entirely liked Robert.

"It is a very difficult case," said Mrs. Meade, "but you have your duty to your employer to consider, as well as your feeling for your friend."

"I know, mother, and I told him if he wouldn't speak, I must. I do think it would be better for Robert, too; but oh! it is such a pity!"

"It is, indeed, a sad pity, my dear; this is a great trial for you, and a hard duty. Let us ask to be directed in the right way, and hope that Robert himself will see the course he ought to take."

"He sees it plain enough," said Alick, sadly; "but he can't follow it, somehow."

"No doubt he finds it very hard to get free. He that committeth sin, is the servant of sin, and it is a bitter bondage."

CHAPTER III.

THE CONFESSION.

THE next morning was Saturday, the last day of the week, and Alick waited anxiously to see whether Robert would keep his word.

Poor Robert! Twenty times did he resolve that he would confess, and as often drew back in terror at the reception he feared to meet from those whom he had so deceived and injured. Directly after the store was opened in the morning, Alick was sent to the other end of the city on an errand, and coming back he met one of the younger clerks, who stopped him as he passed, saying, "There has been a bad affair down at our place."

"What is it?" said Alick, and his heart seemed to stop beating.

"Why, Mr. Howell says there's money

missing, and Mr. Walter was up stairs looking about, and he thought some of the cases looked as if they had been opened. So he took it into his head to look, and have the pieces of goods counted, and sure enough some were gone, and that set them to looking further, and they say that a regular plan of stealing must have been going on this long time, and they think it's old John, for they say he's been seen coming out of the store late at night two or three times, with a basket. He says he only came to get some kindling wood out of the old boxes; but they are afraid it isn't true. Would you have thought it?" But Alick was off without waiting to hear the end of the sentence.

What should he do now? John could not be left to suffer, and how could an exposure of Robert's sin be prevented if John were cleared? His first anxiety was to find Robert and tell him what had happened, and urge

upon him the absolute necessity there was now for confessing his folly and sin.

He met Robert at the door; and, for the first time forgetful of the errand on which he had been sent, he drew him aside, and told him in breathless haste what had happened.

"Oh!" said Robert, "what shall I do now?"

"What shall you do!" said Alick, in no little indignation. "There is only one right course for you to take before God and man. It was bad enough before, it is worse now; but it will be ten times worse still, if you leave an innocent person to suffer in your stead. Every minute makes it harder."

"Oh, if I only *could*!" said Robert, in an agony of indecision.

"Then if you can't, I must," said Alick, firmly. "I have waited too long already. Now, once for all, will you keep your word to me, and take the last chance that is offered you, or shall I go directly to Mr. Young?"

Alick's energy and decision turned the scale. As he had suffered himself to be led by Pearson, so now he allowed himself, as it were, to be driven to confession by the superior firmness and character of a boy so much younger than himself. But this time he was in the right path, and his own right feeling and conscience urged him on in the same way; for Robert had never succeeded in stilling the voice of conscience. It had spoken loudly and often, and all Pearson's jests and specious arguments had been useless to ease him in any degree of the load that seemed crushing him to the earth. It was not that he had not right principles, but he lacked the courage and resolution to act up to them; and he did not ask for help from Him who gives strength to the weak in the day of tribulation.

"I will, Alick, I will," he said at last; "but do you come with me."

"Come, then," said Alick, and Robert fol-

lowed him, feeling more dead than alive. Even when they reached the office door, he tried to stop, and suggested in an agitated whisper that they might wait a little ; but Alick was deaf to any such suggestion. He felt somewhat like a military officer who is leading into battle troops that cannot be exactly depended upon, and who knows that his only chance for victory, is to place them in such a situation that they cannot run away. The curtains were drawn over the glass windows of the office, and there was a murmur of voices within. Mr. Walter opened the door.

"I can't see you just now, Alick," he said, "I am busy."

"But, Mr. Walter," said Alick, hastily, "we know all about it — about John, you mean." And he held Robert by the hand as he spoke, fearful that he would even then escape from the dreaded interview.

"You do!" said Mr. Walter, in surprise.

"Come then," and they went in, and the door closed after them. Alick breathed more freely, he felt that if he could once get Robert where he could not draw back, the confession would be made in sheer desperation. Old John stood on one side of the fire-place, facing Mr. Howell, who was rubbing his spectacles violently,—a habit of his when annoyed. Mr. Young was walking up and down, in great excitement, and he said, as the boys came in:

"If you would only tell the truth, John."

"Mr. Young," said the old man, with touching quietness and dignity, "I have been in this house twenty years, and I can say before God that I never during that time have taken a cent that was not my own. I know that appearances are against me, but God's will be done. I do not blame you, sir."

"Go away," Alick, said Mr. Young, shortly. "I've no time to speak to you now."

"But Alick says he knows something of this unfortunate business," said Mr. Walter.

"He! How? What?" said Mr. Young, suddenly turning toward Alick. "What do you know?"

"Robert knows, sir," said Alick. "He wants to tell you."

"And what does he know?" said Mr. Young, in a tone which showed he had no suspicion of the truth; but Robert was silent.

"Do you mean to say," said Mr. Walter, "that John has done this?"

"No, oh no!" said Robert. "He did not. Indeed, Mr. Young, he never did."

Mr. Young drew a long breath. Mr. Howell stopped polishing his glasses.

"Who did then?" said Mr. Young. "Alick, do you know?"

"Yes, sir," said Alick, colouring deeply, and looking down.

"Alick!" exclaimed Mr. Walter, "is it possible that you are the guilty one?"

"No, sir! oh, no!" cried Robert, who could not for very shame be silent any longer.

"It was I! Alick saw me, and he has been trying to make me tell you for the week past, and I wouldn't."

The partners looked at each other in horror. Of all the young men, Robert was the last one whom they would have suspected. Mr. Howell uttered a sort of groan.

"How could you do such a thing?" said Mr. Young, after a silence of some minutes, resuming his walk up and down. "You, of all the others! John, I beg your pardon with all my heart. Give me your hand, you honest man!"

John obeyed, but he hardly looked relieved, for he, like every one else in the house, was fond of Robert.

"And now," said Mr. Walter, "let us hear the whole story. Oh, why didn't you speak out before?"

"I didn't dare," said Robert, in a whisper.

"Didn't dare!" said Mr. Walter, with

soldierly contempt for the cowardice; "and how did you dare to do it now?"

"We heard that John was suspected, and he said he would tell if I would come with him," said Alick.

"That is to say," said Mr. Young, who guessed the state of the case, "you said you would tell if he didn't, and brought him here, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said Alick, reluctantly.

"Well!" said Mr. Young, "and how long have you known it?"

"Only since Christmas eve, sir." And in as few words as possible Alick told the story.

"Poor fellow!" said Mr. Young, "you have had a hard time. You would have done better to tell me in the first place."

"I thought it would be better for him to do it, sir. And oh, Mr. Young, he has been so miserable about it! indeed he is sorry."

"And did he promise you that he would tell us?" said Mr. Walter.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Walter and his uncle exchanged glances, and Alick knew perfectly well what must be their opinion of Robert, and he coloured deeply, with a sort of personal feeling that he partook of the shame.

"Come," said Mr. Young to Robert, who had dropped on a chair and hidden his face in his hands, "let us hear the whole. You must speak out now for your own sake."

Thus exhorted, Robert found voice to tell the whole miserable tale from beginning to end. The partners heard him in silence until it came out, how, after his detection and his promise to Alick, he had once more robbed his employers at the bidding of Pearson! Then Mr. Walter lost patience.

"I never heard of anything so contemptible," he said. "Couldn't you say you wouldn't?"

"Ah, Mr. Walter," said old Mr. Howell, speaking for the first time, "there are some

people in this world, who can't say they won't."

"Go on, Robert," said Mr. Young. But there was little more to tell. The story was soon ended, and Robert sat in silence, waiting for sentence to be pronounced.

"Do you know how much it all comes to?" said Mr. Young.

"No, sir."

"It must be over a thousand dollars."

Mr. Howell nodded, and resumed the polishing of his spectacles.

"If you had come to me when Alick first wanted you to," said Mr. Young, "I might have saved you from exposure; but I don't know how to do it now. John has been publicly suspected, and he must be cleared."

"Never mind me, sir," said old John; "if you and Mr. Walter know the truth, I don't care for any one else."

"But I do," said Mr. Young. "If it were only himself would suffer, I am much inclined

to think I should call in an officer, and let the law take its course; but there is his mother and sister."

"Oh, sir," said Robert; "must they know?"

"I don't see how it is to be helped. Why did you not have some mercy on them yourself?"

Robert was silent—self-condemned.

"And I dare say you are ever so much in debt, now," continued Mr. Young. "You are under age; so, I suppose, your mother will be answerable for you. You have no means of repaying us, of course?"

"No, sir," said Robert, in a broken voice; "and you can say nothing worse of me than I deserve. I've deceived you shamefully, and made a most ungrateful return for all your kindness. I've been a thief and a liar; and if Alick had not driven me into coming here, I dare say I should have left John to suffer in my place. I deserve the penalty of the law, and shall not try to avoid it."

"Well, well!" said Mr. Young, a little softened, "we must think what we can do. You may be thankful that Alick did drive you to it. I only wish he had driven you before."

"He tried, sir."

"I dare say. Wait here till I come back. Alick, you and John come with me."

Mr. Young went out into the store, where, ever since Alick and Robert had entered the office, there had been a great though subdued excitement.

"I have to say," said Mr. Young, after assembling the clerks and porters, "that John has been wrongfully accused, and that in this, as in all other matters, he has been faithful; and I have only to express my regret that he was ever suspected. Alick Meade, by an accident, knew the truth, and has told it to Mr. Walter and to me. He is in no way to blame, and has acted in a manner that does him great credit. I shall enter into no particulars;

and whatever surmise any one here present may entertain, I make it my especial request that they will not talk about this matter abroad."

He then returned to the office, taking Alick with him. Robert was sitting where they had left him, and Mr. Walter and Mr. Howell were talking together in a low voice.

"Robert," said Mr. Young, "I want you to go home now, and stay there until we can make some arrangement about this matter. I don't want to be hard on you, but it is impossible that I should keep you here, and it would be better for you that you should leave the city. I can't recommend you to another situation. I do not send you to prison, from the regard I feel for your mother and sister; and then I don't think it would do you any good. I don't wish to be harsh, but I do want you to feel how great your sin is, and not try to excuse it."

"I don't, sir," said Robert. "There is no excuse for me."

"It is better for you to feel so. Now go home. Alick will go with you and stay with you to-day. I don't think you are fit to be left alone, and one of us will see you this evening, and let you know what we decide; and, Robert, try to make your repentance true and acceptable to God, and ask Him to confirm you in the resolution to walk henceforth in the way of His commandments."

"I'll try, sir," said Robert; and he and Alick went out together by the back way.

On the walk home, Robert never spoke a word, and Alick, whose heart ached for him, did not know how to break the silence. When they reached his room, Robert locked the door, and seemed to feel his utter wretchedness. Alick drew near to him, and spoke kind words.

"You don't quite hate me, then?" said Robert.

"No, indeed! Oh, Robert, I am so sorry."

"I wish I had done as you wanted me to in the first place; but it can't be helped now. I am glad Katharine is not at home. Walter can't help despising me, and when I look back, I don't wonder: but I can't see how I could have been such a miserable weak fool. They meant to have raised my salary this next year, and I might have done so much to help mother, instead of being a burden on her. Oh, how could I be so deceived?"

"Robert," said Alick, coming up to his side, "I think it is because you forgot to commit your way unto the Lord, and so He did not direct your steps."

"I know it, Alick," said Robert, sadly, "but I will now, and always hereafter;" and the unhappy youth, with earnest expression of repentance and contrition, asked forgiveness for Christ's sake.

Alick stayed with him till late in the after-

noon, when Mr. Walter Young came, and Alick slipped away.

"Do not go home yet," said Mr. Walter; and Alick went out and walked about the street. He returned in about half an hour, and it was Mr. Walter's voice which bade him come in. Mr. Walter had just risen to go.

"You will abide by this?" he said to Robert.

"Yes, indeed I will!" said Robert.

"Very well, then, we will go to-morrow. Good night," and he held out his hand. Robert blushed deeply as he took it in his own; and Mr. Walter, bidding good night to Alick, left the room.

"Well," said Alick, eagerly, "what are they going to do with you?"

"They say they will not prosecute me, and Mr. Young thinks I had better go home and work on the farm and help mother. They say if I will stay at home for a year, and be steady, they will take me back again, per-

haps, and put me in a way to repay them. And just think, Alick, it would have been found out, anyway, for the police have been watching that shop for some time, and one of the officers came to Mr. Young this very afternoon, and told him that I had been seen to go there. So if you hadn't fairly forced me into the office this morning, I should have been arrested this afternoon. And they are after Pearson for forging soldiers' papers, but they say he has left in the California steamer."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said Alick. "Then you won't see him again, and you will be steady, won't you, Robert?"

"I'll try, Alick, God helping me," said Robert, earnestly.

We will not dwell on the scene that took place at Robert's home, when Mr. Walter, as gently as he could, told the mother and sister the painful news of Robert's disgrace. Mrs. Eddy was a woman of much spirit and decision. She paid Robert's debts at a great

sacrifice to herself, and insisted on mortgaging her farm to make good the loss the concern had sustained by her son's dishonesty, notwithstanding their reluctance to press their claim.

Robert's life for the next year was not an easy one. His mother, though a woman of sense and principle, had no great gentleness of character, and feeling deeply and bitterly the disgrace and the loss, she could not help now and then reminding him of his folly and sin. It was sometimes galling enough to the young man to be treated like a child, and reminded of his dependent state; but he bore it with patience, knowing that he had deserved a much severer punishment. He worked very hard on the farm, and what spare time he had was devoted to reading and study. Alick heard from him very often, and Mr. Young kept himself informed of Robert's conduct, and was much gratified to learn that he remained faithful to

his good resolutions. At the end of the year he wrote, offering to Robert the situation he had held before, which was now vacant. It was thankfully accepted, and Robert returned to the old place, to find Alick promoted from errand boy to clerk, a junior clerk it is true, but with an increase of wages, and a prospect of rising to a permanent situation.

Robert did not return to his old boarding place. He took board with Mrs. Meade, and occupied her little front room at a very moderate rent, for he was intent on repaying to his mother and the firm the losses they had sustained on his account. He was sometimes subject to coldness and slights from his former companions, who could not but suspect that he had been deeply concerned in the thefts of the year before, and sometimes he was laughed at for his economy by those who did not understand his motives; and it cost him some effort to resist the persuasions of his former evil associates, but with God's

help he has so far persevered, and is in a fair way of retrieving his character.

"If I ever do turn out anything," he said to Alick, one night, as they walked home together, "it will be owing to you; but for your steadiness that morning, I believe I should have been in a cell in State's Prison this minute."

"I'm sure it has been owing to your steadiness the past year," said Alick. "And it was hard for you, I know."

"It was, sometimes, and I never could have kept on if I had not remembered where I must look for strength."

If these pages should meet the eye of some youth in a responsible position, and surrounded by temptations, may they lead him to the conviction of his own weakness, and prompt him to look up to the Strong for strength. Robert Eddy's history has many a counterpart in our country and times.

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